

# A Practical Study of COLOSSIANS

## How Christians Grow

### “Christ is All and in All”

Key verse 3:11b — *“Christ is all and in all.”*

### **Study Number Four – Maturing in Christ – Colossians 1:21-2:3**

The title of this study is “Maturing in Christ” and our key verse is verse 28.

Once again it’s just that little PURPOSE CLAUSE at the end of verse 28 that forms the theme for this particular study.

Our overall theme is:

“Christ is All and in All”—Colossians 3:11b.

He’s all that a man needs and He’s in all that a man does.

We will summarize the previous three studies before we get started.

Stage #1: Christ Changed My Life (Colossians 1:1-8).

We focused on those three key words:

1. FAITH—which is in Christ,
2. LOVE—which is manifest through our lives, and
3. the HOPE which is laid up for us.

In Stage #2 we looked at: The Will, the Walk, and the Work of Christ (Colossians 1:9-14)

He was telling these folks in the Lycus Valley, that he'd never met, that he was praying for them.

And the first thing that he is concerned about is them knowing the will of God for their lives, to walk worthy of the Lord Jesus, and to do the work that the Father has gifted them to do.

Stage #3: Christ in First Place (Colossians 1:15-20).

In verse 18 we read that: “He might come to have first place in all things.”

Now we're going to talk about “Maturing in Christ.”

This is a subject that is often neglected. It's basically learning how to grow up in Him after we become Christians.

It is said of Jesus in:

Luke 2:52

And Jesus kept on increasing in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and men.

Life is designed so that we progress, that we move forward. Salvation is not a terminal experience. It's just the beginning. It's a birth and we grow and mature as we cooperate with the Spirit of God as He produces Christlikeness in us.

Let's go to the book of Philippians for 2 verses and then we'll jump right into the text.

### Philippians 2:12

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

And then:

### Philippians 3:10

that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

We're going to start at verse 21 in chapter 1 and go down to chapter 2 and verse 3. We're going to stop off there for a minute when we get to the key verse—Colossians 1:28.

**v. 21 And you who were at one time estranged and hostile in attitude, evil in your deeds,**

“And you who were at one time estranged and hostile in attitude, evil in your deeds,”

What he’s going to do is tell us the paths that each of us have. He’s saying there are **THREE THINGS** that are true of us before we come to Christ:

1. “you who were at one time estranged”

Notice, it’s not God that’s estranged. It’s us. He never has to be reconciled. We are the ones who want to go it alone. We’re the ones who are proud and selfish and therefore we are “estranged” naturally when we’re born.

He said the same thing to the Ephesian saints:

**Ephesians 2:12, 13**

Remember that in those days, you were living utterly apart from Christ, you were enemies of God’s children, and he had promised you no help. You were without God, and without hope, but now you belong to Christ Jesus; and though you were once far away from God, now you’ve been brought very near to him because of what Jesus Christ has done for you with his blood.

Catesby Paget said:

Near, so very near to God,  
Nearer I could not be;  
For in the person of his Son  
I'm just as near as he.  
(source unknown)

1. We're "estranged."
2. We're "hostile in attitude"—we're opposed in attitude to what God has for us. We're unfriendly. We're carrying a chip on our shoulders is the picture in that Greek word.

And the third description is:

3. "evil in your deeds."

A "hostile...attitude" will eventually end up in "evil...deeds."

So it isn't a pretty picture. He starts the subject of maturing by beginning at point A—from the basis of what God had to work with when we first had the initiation of salvation.

We were "estranged" from God,  
we're "hostile in attitude," and  
we're "evil in our deeds."

Colossians 1:10 magnifies for us, if you will, the picture of

what we are in Christ:

Colossians 1:10

to live (walk) worthy of the Lord, and to please Him in everything, in every good work, bearing fruit and increasing in the knowledge of God;

So what he's done in verse 21 is shown their PAST.

Now in verse 22 he's going to show the PRESENT and the FUTURE of the relationship before he digs into the main thought.

“you were at one time estranged, hostile in attitude, and evil in your deeds,”—in the PAST.

But now we come to that wonderful verse that describes it.

**v. 22 but now He reconciled in the body of His flesh through His death, in order that He might present you holy and without blemish and blameless before Him [on the day of Judgment]—**

“but”—CONTRAST—

“now”—PRESENT—“He reconciled in the body of His flesh through His death,”—

and then PURPOSE, which points to the FUTURE—“in order

that He might present you holy and without blemish and blameless before Him [on the day of Judgment]—”

Doesn't that excite you to see the whole program in just two verses?

Spurgeon said:

(Exploring the Mind & Heart of the Prince of Preachers: Five thousand illustrations under one-thousand topical headings from the works of C. H. Spurgeon by C. H. Spurgeon)

The third of Genesis reveals Ruin; the third of Romans teaches Redemption; the third of John sets forth Regeneration.

p. 94

Max Lucado uses John Newton as an illustration of the beautiful change that takes place in a person's life:

(Outlive Your Life: You Were Made to Make a Difference by Max Lucado)

This former slave trader served as a minister from 1764 until his death in 1807. He was a confidant of well-known leaders such as Hannah More and William Wilberforce. His hundreds of hymns fill churches with music. Yet on his deathbed the writer of the hymn “Amazing Grace” said these words to a young minister: “I'm going on before you, but you'll soon come after me. When you arrive, our friendship will no doubt cause

you to inquire for me. But I can tell you already where you'll most likely find me. I'll be sitting at the feet of the thief whom Jesus saved His dying moments on the cross."<sup>1</sup>

John Newton never forgot who had lifted him up.

1. Mission Gate Ministry, "Gospel of Matthew, chapter 20," [www.charityadvantage.com/MissionGateMinistry/images/Matt20.doc](http://www.charityadvantage.com/MissionGateMinistry/images/Matt20.doc). pp. 117-18

That's the picture you get when we come to verse 22.

"He reconciled in the body of His flesh"—Christ purchased redemption through His death upon the Cross—"through His death,"

And why did He do that?

PURPOSE—"in order that"—

FUTURE—"He might present you"—THREE WAYS:

1. "holy,"
2. "without blemish," and
3. "blameless before Him [on the day of Judgement]"

It's cool to know the Judge already and know that He's got everything taken care of before we get there. That we just skate through because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done

for us in reconciliation.

So what WE WERE in verse 21 and the glorious things that are going to happen. We've been reconciled and now He's going to present us "holy and without blemish...before Him [on the day of Judgment]."

This is what WE WERE in verse 21 and what WE ARE in verse 22.

Let's go back to those words in verses 12 and 13 for a few minutes. The Father qualified me. He rescued me. I was going down for the last time and He transferred me into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Then the Lord Jesus provided redemption and forgiveness. And why all that? So that you can pass the test when you get to glory because you're going to be dressed in His righteousness.

You're going to be "holy." You're not going to be estranged anymore.

You're going to be "without blemish." You're not going to be hostile in your attitude.

And you're not going to be evil in your deeds because you're "blameless before Him."

A wonderful work of salvation.

When we're talking about salvation that's wonderful, we looked at those two verses. That's not all there is. It begins a life pursuit of being made like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul said to the Philippians in:

### Philippians 1:6

I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will continue to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

In other words, that's the day that we're out of here and we're home with Him.

In the first epistle of John we read:

### 1 John 3:2

...we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.

They see work going on daily.

### Jude 24, 25

Now unto Him who is able to guard you against stumbling, present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and

majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever more.

That's the whole purpose in salvation redemption.

Isobel Kuhn quotes A.W. Tozer in one of her books:

(By Searching: My Journey Through Doubt Into Faith by Isobel Kuhn)

The only way to be holy is daily to hand over to the Holy Spirit what Dr. Tozer calls “the hyphenated sins of the human spirit . . . self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-admiration, self-love, and a host of others like them . . . which can be removed only in spiritual experience, never by mere instruction. As well try to instruct leprosy out of our system. There must be a work of God in destruction before we are free. *We must invite the Cross to do its deadly work within us. We must bring our self sins to the Cross for judgment.*”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The Pursuit of God*, by A. W. Tozer.  
p. 153

Warren Wiersbe in his book on A. W. Tozer verifies that. He says:

(The Best of A. W. Tozer: Book 2 compiled by Warren W. Wiersbe)

Spiritual life cannot feed on negatives. The man who is constantly reciting the evils of his unconverted days is looking

in the wrong direction. He is like a man trying to run a race while looking back over his shoulder.

What the Christian used to be is altogether the least important thing about him. What he is yet to be is all that should concern him. He may occasionally, as Paul sometimes did, remember to his own shame the life he once lived; but that should be only a quick glance; it is never to be a fixed glaze. Our long permanent look is on God and the glory that shall be revealed [in Him].

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**v. 23 if indeed you are continuing in the faith, having been founded and steadfast, and without shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, that gospel which was proclaimed in all creation which is under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.**

“if indeed you are continuing in the faith, having been founded and steadfast, and without shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, that gospel which was proclaimed in all creation which is under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.”

Some of you thought you lost your salvation right there.

“if indeed you are continuing in the faith,”—and you didn’t get any further than that.

In the book of Galatians, Paul had a great fear that those

Galatian Christians never did come to faith in Christ or they wouldn't be deceived by performance and legalism like they were in the keeping of the Law. That's not true in the Lycus Valley.

As nearly as we can tell, when pastor Epaphras got to Rome and gave Paul the report, it wasn't an issue of the wholesale abandonment of their Christian faith to Gnosticism. They were still stable in the faith. So these words are in the PERFECT TENSE.

“if indeed you are continuing”—in the PRESENT TENSE—“in the faith,”

In other words, you're demonstrating what you started out to do and your faith was revealing that.

“having been founded”—they're GROUNDED—“and steadfast”

### 1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast...

“and without shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, that gospel which was proclaimed in all creation which is under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.”

Do you see what he's doing?

Here he has young pastor Epaphras sitting there talking about his ministry in the church. Then he says, “Oh by the way, I’m the one that instructed him and he’s the one that brought the message to you. And I’m signing off on the message that he brought to you.”

In other words, he’s putting behind the pastor all of the authority and all of the message with his personal blessing.

That has to have been a great encouragement to Epaphras as he goes back to deal with these troublesome problems.

Now we’re also going to see that there was a problem in Laodicea just down the valley. We have Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colossae. Remember Laodicea because that was in the letters to the seven churches. It was the last one and it wasn’t a very pretty message at all.

So evidently they’d been affected by this as well. Paul reflects on his concern:

### Galatians 1:6, 7

I am marveling that so quickly you are transferring yourselves from Him who called you into the sphere of Christ’s grace unto a different gospel....

They had already abandoned the Gospel so he’s pushing the panic button there.

1. “founded”

1 Corinthians 3:11

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

2. “steadfast”

1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

3. “without shifting”

Matthew 7:24-27—building your house upon the rock rather than on the sand.

“founded” on Christ,

“steadfast” in the storm, and

not “shifting from the hope.”

Now he uses **FOUR DESCRIPTIVE PHRASES** here when he talks about the Gospel:

The “gospel which was proclaimed in all creation.”

It was a “gospel which you heard” but it wasn’t from Paul. It was from Epaphras. He’s careful not to say that he’s the one who was communicating the Gospel there in the Lycus Valley

3. “that gospel which was proclaimed in all creation” and “which is under heaven” and

4. “of which I, Paul, became a minister.

He identifies with the Gospel.

Now he does the same thing in Galatians 1:

### Galatians 1:11

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now comes a hard verse.

**v. 24 Now I am rejoicing in my sufferings on your behalf, and I am filling up the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for the sake of His body, which is the church.**

“Now I am rejoicing in my sufferings on your behalf, and I am filling up the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my

flesh for the sake of His body, which is the church.”

There are people who actually believe that Paul was doing some of the suffering that Christ left unattended when He died upon the Cross. Such heresy.

What he’s talking about here is part of the curriculum that every one of us faces.

SUFFERING 101 is just a required course that we have to take before we begin to move toward Christlikeness. We should do it with an attitude of joy, as we’re going to see here.

“Now I am rejoicing in my sufferings on your behalf”

He’s in prison in Rome and they are brothers and sisters in Christ.

“and I am filling up the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for the sake of His body, which is the church.”

It’s for the “sake of His body, which is the church,” but the suffering that he’s doing in the “flesh” is that which was lacking in the affliction of Christ.

Christ suffers with every one of us who suffers. He still suffers today with us as His children when we’re going through tough times. Scripture’s makes that clear.

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This will help us understand what Paul means.

One of the most eye-catching witnesses we can have for Christ is JOY when the wheels have come off and the wagon has turned over.

That will carry us a long way down the road in our witness for Christ, when people see that unchangeable joy that's there when we're having a really rough time.

Scripture says that. That was one of the first marks of the early church in Acts 5:40-42.

After the Sanhedrin got through with them:

### Acts 5:40-42

And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as Christ.

Peter believed the same thing:

### 1 Peter 4:12, 13

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trials which

are to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed you can be glad also with exceeding joy.

James comes right along and verifies it too:

### James 1:2-4

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, perseverance or endurance...

So in the PAST he "became a minister."

Now in verse 24, in the PRESENT, he's "rejoicing in [the] sufferings" on the Lord's behalf.

This is not foreign to his own rights.

### Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice!

Philippians gives us his game plan for ministry:

### Philippians 2:17

Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy

with you all.

If we're going to die for our faith, be happy with that. If that's the Father's will for us, we want to joy and rejoice with you all.

“I am filling up the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh.”

So what does it mean when he says “filling up...the afflictions of Christ”?

In Acts 9:4, in that encounter on the Damascus Road, what did the Lord say?

### Acts 9:4

... “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

He had to take a double-take on that because he was hearing a voice from heaven and he was on his way to Damascus to make it pretty miserable for any Christians that he found. He has to have an attitude adjustment to understand that what He's doing is hurting Christ. That's what he says in the rest of the verse.

### Acts 9:5

And he said, [Paul said to Him, or Saul] “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

That's the suffering of Christ that He shares with each of us as we go through life and the experiences that we have. You know someone who cares. You know someone who will always be there. You know someone who's going to turn it all around for good even though it looks like it's going to be a loss for the moment. And that's the picture.

Alexander Maclaren said:

Whatsoever pain or trial is born in fellowship with him is felt and born by him.  
(source unknown)

When he was commissioned at the end of chapter 9 he says:

Acts 9:16

I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.

Then when he finished the Galatian epistle in:

Galatians 6:17

As for the rest, let no man furnish me trouble for I am bearing on my body the marks of Jesus.

Vance Havner had a real tough curriculum for the end of his life. He lost his precious wife Sarah who always drove him everywhere to ministry and met the train when he was

coming in. It was really hard for him to go on the rest of the way. He describes going on the road like walking through the valley of the shadow of death, to go and minister without his sweetheart and soulmate. He says this:

(Though I Walk Through the Valley by Vance Havner)

Today at lunch a friend of mine told me that Spurgeon said that God is too good to be unkind, too wise to be mistaken, and when you cannot trace His hand, you can always trust His heart. [Isn't that good?] I have been through much that I do not understand. God does not ask me to understand it but to accept it. He is saying, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7).

I cannot trace His hand but I can trust His heart. I know that God is love and back of all His doings is that love. It sent His Son into this world and reached its climax on Calvary.

p. 89

So the suffering is the suffering of Christ that He's sharing, for the body of Christ "which is the church." The body suffers with the head. The head suffers with the body. The union of the two together describes what's going on.

You were only required by the Roman authorities to go one mile. But there are some people in your life that'll go the second mile. Isobel Kuhn describes five people in her missionary career with the Lisu people who qualified as "second mile people." They were there no matter what. She said:

(Second-Mile People by Isobel Kuhn)

‘Why should I start at the plough [in other words the painful experience] of my Lord, that maketh deep furrows on my soul?’ cried out the valiant Rutherford, in days of long-forgotten suffering. ‘I know He is no idle husbandman; he purposeth a crop.’  
p. 119

There’s going to be fruit that is borne from it.

Joni Eareckson Tada said:

(A Place of Healing: Wrestling with the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain, and God’s Sovereignty by Joni Eareckson Tada)

No . . . let me amend that. Bringing honor to the name of my Savior and King is uppermost, whether He chooses to give me relief now or just around the corner in His Father’s house. Either way, He will help me and save me and, yes, crown me with joy.

Just as He always has.

p. 20

Tozer said:

(The best of A. W. Tozer: Book 2 compiled by Warren W. Wiersbe)

If the Spirit takes charge of your life, He will expect unquestioning obedience in everything. He will not tolerate in you the self-sins even though they are permitted and excused by most Christians. By the self-sins I mean self-love, self-pity, self-seeking, self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-aggrandizement, self-defense. You will find the Spirit to be in sharp opposition to the easy ways of the world and of the mixed multitude within the precincts of religion.  
pp. 76-77

**v. 25 Of which I became a servant according to the stewardship of God which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God,**

“Of which I became a servant according to the stewardship of God which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God,”

I was a “minister” back in verse 23 and here I’m a “servant.” In the plan of God, that’s MINISTRY.

Ministry involves 3 S’s:

1. SUFFERING,
2. SERVING, and
3. SPEAKING.

That in itself is about three full-time jobs when you try to put it altogether. Considering the circumstances that surround so

much of ministry, those are the things you can expect.

When we get to verse 26, he talks about the “mystery.”

**v. 26 the mystery which has been hidden from the ages  
and from the generations; but now made known to  
His saints,**

“the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from  
the generations; but now made known to His saints,”

When you have the word “mystery” written by Paul it is not a  
mystery—a murder mystery. It is a TRUTH that has been  
hidden in the Old Testament but is now revealed in the New  
Testament.

Paul told the Ephesian saints that the church was a mystery.  
And Christ when He came said “I will build my church.”

What he’s talking about here is a “mystery” that he’s getting  
ready to reveal.

You can also see the word “mystery” used in relationship to  
the RAPTURE of the church:

1 Corinthians 15:51-54

I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all  
be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, . . . the  
dead in Christ shall rise first, and we which are alive and

remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds. . . .

## 1 Corinthians 2:7

but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

Now he's getting ready to tell us about that "mystery."

Curtis Tucker has written a book on the kingdom and the reality of the kingdom now. Listen to what he says about the mystery of the kingdom:

(Majestic Destiny: Kingdom Hope is Rising by Curtis H. Tucker)

With proper use of the principles of interpretation we can conclude:

- The mysteries are truths about the literal kingdom of Messiah, which were not previously discussed in the Old Testament.
- Jesus is not teaching a new form of the kingdom, He is giving more information about the kingdom being offered and is certain to come.
- The mysteries were given to the disciples to be understood and applied to their lives prior to the inception of the

church and the principles will be applicable even after the church is gone; until “the end of the age.”

p. 162

Now we see the encompassment of this word “mystery” and how it fits so much of what Paul is teaching with regard to the church, the body of Christ.

**v. 27 to whom God desired to make known what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

“to whom God desired to make known what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles,”—now here comes the mystery—“which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

That’s the MYSTERY that he wants to talk about as he gets ready to tell us what should happen because of that mystery.

Galatians 4:19

My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you

In other words, Christ comes to dwell within us. The power of the Spirit is producing Christlikeness as we daily cooperate.

Galatians 2:20

“I have been crucified with Christ; it’s no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

Martin Luther said:

Faith connects you so intimately with [Jesus], that he in you become as it were one person. As such you may boldly say, I am now one with Christ.

(source unknown)

He’s caught the truth.

Here comes our **KEY VERSE** for the study.

**v. 28 Whom we are proclaiming, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, in order that we may present every man mature in Christ.**

“Whom we are proclaiming,”—this is Jesus—“admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom,”—there’s your **KEY PHRASE**, the **PURPOSE CLAUSE**.

“in order that we may present every man mature in Christ.”

The purpose clause in our last study was in verse 18: “in order that He might come to have first place.”

That tells us what He desires for us. Now he's adding to that with this purpose clause and saying:

“in order that we may present every man mature in Christ.”

Paul's telling us he has a goal for ministry and it's to stimulate growth and maturity and to help people along the way.

Now he uses **THREE KEY WORDS** and they're in the **PRESENT TENSE**:

1. “proclaiming,”
2. “admonishing,” and
3. “teaching.”

The **PURPOSE** for doing those three things is:

“we may present every man mature in Christ.”

Now let's go back to a few of the other epistles for just to pick up some verses.

### 2 Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

## TRANSFORMATION.

### Ephesians 4:15

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.

### 1 John 3:2

...we are the children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.

**STAGE #4:** Maturing in Christ is the goal and objective of the ministry, to “present every [one] mature in Christ.”

Let’s talk about some different words.

A **SPIRITUAL PERSON** becomes spiritual when the Spirit of God comes in when by faith you receive Christ. That’s the spiritual person.

The **MATURE PERSON** however is a time word. It’s like you wonder if your kids will ever grow up or mature. You go through the painful process of time and experience. So time and experience, the Spirit uses along with the disciplined study of the Word of God and cooperating with the Spirit of God to produce Christlikeness.

That's the difference between being spiritual and being a mature person.

Peter is famous for that. He ends the second epistle by saying “grow up in Christ.” (ref. 2 Peter 3:18)

In the first epistle he says “you are and you shall be a man moving from the shifting sand to a stable rock.” That's what the Lord said to him.

The apostle Paul was a PERSECUTOR and he PREACHES the Gospel.

John was the “son of Thunder” and he became the APOSTLE OF LOVE.

These three words are critical to implement on a daily basis so that we are making the progress that we need in our spiritual growth to bear fruit in the lives of others.

Three KEY WORDS:

1. TIME—we have to set time to be with Him.

Nothing is more important in your day—first things first—time with the Lord.

2. SUBMISSION to whatever He tells us.

In other words, don't resist. Submit to it even though you

don't understand.

### 3. OBEDIENCE—Obedience is better than sacrifice.

Those are the words that Samuel gave to Saul after he botched up that deal with the Amalekites and lost his kingdom in the process.

Sometimes we get those books with titles that make us wonder if it's some super spiritual person that's trying to tell us how they've done it. Listen to this from Ruth Paxson:

(Life on the Highest Plane: A Study of the Spiritual Nature and Needs of Man by Ruth Paxson)

The process of conformity is going on day by day in the spiritual man's life. It is a transformation from obedience to obedience, from dependence to dependence, from victory to victory, from holiness to holiness, from righteousness to righteousness and from love to love.

p. 262

Did she cover all the bases?

Gary Thomas has plowed some new territory. He's read a lot of those old classic writers—Thomas à Kempis, William Law—and he's written a book called *Thirsting for God*. It couples together the discipline of our private devotional life in cooperating with what the Spirit of God is doing. Listen to this:

(Thirsting for God: Spiritual Refreshment for the Sacred Journey by Gary L. Thomas)

This is an *active, intentional* pursuit. It takes effort, focus, and much energy. The writers of the Christian classics weren't afraid of this and even ridiculed those who merely read about Christ's example but never put these traits into practice. Scupoli compares such believers to "soldiers, who, in their tents, before battle, are full of heroism, but when the fight really begins, cast away their arms and take to flight."  
p. 49

Well said.

Fénelon says this:

(Thirsting for God: Spiritual Refreshment for the Sacred Journey by Gary L. Thomas)

Fénelon brings this idea to a firm conclusion. "Go forward always with confidence, without letting yourself be touched by the grief of a sensitive pride, which cannot bear to see itself imperfect. Your fault will serve, by this inner confusion, to make you die to yourself."<sup>5</sup>

5. Francois Fénelon, *Christian Perfection*, (1704-1717) 41.  
p. 91

Those kind of statements are so rich and they're such a

blessing.

Swindoll comes alongside with that in his book on the Holy Spirit:

(Embraced by the Spirit: The Untold Blessings of Intimacy with God by Charles R. Swindoll)

Ian Thomas described this well: “The life that He lived qualified Him for the death that He died. And the death that He died qualifies us for the life that He lived.”

Jesus told us that the life He lived is possible to be lived day after day when we draw upon the strength of the Spirit of God who lives within us.

pp. 13-14

David Platt says:

(Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream by David Platt)

On the other hand, while some professing Christians have rejected universalism intellectually, practically they may end up leading universalistic lives. They claim Christ is necessary for salvation, yet they live their Christianity in silence, as if people around them in the world will indeed be okay in the end without Christ.

p. 142

That’s the only comfort you can have if you’re a silent disciple.

The people around you that aren't okay and are doomed for an eternity apart from Christ. Maybe God put us right there in their lives at that time to share the Message.

Tony Dungy quotes an old Irish proverb that his father told him:

(The Mentor Leader: Secrets to Building People and Teams that Win Consistently by Tony Dungy with Nathan Whitaker)

*You've got to do your own growing, no matter how tall your grandfather was.*

OLD IRISH PROVERB

p. 1

That makes it personal.

(Anchor Man: How a Father Can Anchor His Family in Christ for the Next 100 Years by Steve Farrar)

Yogi Berra once said, "If you can't imitate him, don't copy him." That's pretty good advice. And the flip side of that is, "If you can imitate him, copy him."

p. 202

You can in the dynamic, spiritual, growing relationship. The apostle has described it for us.

**v. 29 For which also I am toiling, striving according to (controlled by) His energy, which energy is operating in me in power.**

“For which also I am toiling, striving according to (controlled by) His energy, which energy is operating in me in power.”

“He’s strengthened with all glorious might” (Colossians 1:11).

He’s an athlete in training. He’s “toiling.” He’s “striving” with all the energy that he has to accomplish what the Lord wants for him.

He told Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:9, 10 (NLT)

This is the truth and everyone should accept it. We work hard and suffer much in order that people will believe it, for our hope is in the living God who died for all, and particularly for those who have accepted his salvation.

(Majestic Destiny: Kingdom Hope is Rising by Curtis H. Tucker)

***A ship is safe in harbor, but that’s not what ships are for.***

William Shedd

p. 33

That certainly speaks of what we need to be doing.

Let’s go back and let Joni Eareckson Tada orient the growth

and the experience:

(A Place of Healing: Wrestling with the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain, and God's Sovereignty by Joni Eareckson Tada)

If God chooses to heal me of this two-year wrestling match ... I will give Him great glory. (Oh boy, you just watch!)

But if for His own good, unfathomable reasons, He chooses to allow the anguish—this sharp, deep, thorn in my flesh—to remain in some form until He finally issues my boarding pass for heaven (I want a window seat), then I will also pour my life into bringing glory to His most precious, saving, healing, holy name.

*I will!*

p. 113

Do what you want me to do.

(Life is Like Licking Honey Off a Thorn: Reflections on Living Wisely in this World of Pain and Joy by Susan Lenzkes)

Our heavenly Father truly knows all that we could be, should be, and were created to be. He doesn't know this as some vague "hope" but as reality. How it must have hurt Him to give up this reality for the lie we bought! Oh, the high intentions He had, and has, for us! Yet here we are, charting our own course and trying to pretend it doesn't matter that we aren't getting there.

p. 78

And then from *Radical*, David Platt says:

(Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream by David Platt)

This is how God works. He puts his people in positions where they are desperate for his power, and then he shows his provision in ways that display his greatness.

p. 48

**2:v.1 For I am desiring you to know how great a struggle I am having in your behalf and those in Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face,**

“For I am desiring you to know how great a struggle I am having in your behalf and those in Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face,”—in the flesh.

He’s referring to the whole group of people in the Lycus Valley and he’s speaking of the church at Laodicea as well.

He’s been going through some tough times. He doesn’t define it all here completely but he doesn’t often magnify his suffering other than by just using a word. He doesn’t give you the details of the suffering.

Do you remember that great passage in 2 Corinthians 12 where he says “I asked the Lord three times to take away the thorn in my flesh and the Lord said no, no, no”? (ref. 2 Corinthians 12:8)

He never did tell us what the thorn in the flesh was. It was an issue that was irritating and he thought was hampering his ministry. And the Lord said no but “My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness.’ Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (ref. 2 Corinthians 12:9)

That’s the attitude that he has oftentimes and we wish we knew a little bit more about it.

In the book *In the Arena*, Isobel Kuhn says:

(In the Arena by Isobel Kuhn)

*Frustrations* — have much to do in conforming us into His image. Yes, suffering, but also His sweet consoling fellowship in that suffering. It reveals to us the power of His resurrection, and when He arranges a release for us that no mortal could manipulate — *we come to know Him*.

[And then she ends it with Amy Carmichael]

Rock of my heart and my fortress tower  
Dear are Thy thoughts to me.  
Like the unfolding of some fair flower  
Opening silently.  
And on the edge of these Thy ways  
Standing in awe as heretofore,  
Thee do I worship, Thee do I praise

And adore!

AMY CARMICHAEL

pp. 68-69

The PURPOSE in doing all that:

**v. 2 in order that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and resulting in all wealth of the full assurance such as understanding brings, resulting in a thorough knowledge of the mystery of God,**

“in order that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and resulting in all wealth of the full assurance such as understanding brings, resulting in a thorough knowledge of the mystery of God,”

That “mystery” now is Christ in you, the HOPE OF GLORY. He’s described the ministry, the goals and the objectives of mature saints in Colosse.

He ends with this great verse.

**v. 3 Christ, in whom are all the hidden treasures of the wisdom and knowledge.**

“Christ, in whom are all the hidden treasures of the wisdom and knowledge.”

Just to know where it is and that tells the Gnostics that

they're looking in the wrong place, because the "wisdom and knowledge" is in our precious Savior.

### 1 Corinthians 1:30

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

Back to Joni Eareckson Tada one more time:

### (A Place of Healing: Wrestling with the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain, and God's Sovereignty by Joni Eareckson Tada)

As you may know from your own Bible study, that word "workmanship" [that is us—we are His workmanship—Ephesians 2:10] in the original language, Greek, is *poiema*, from which we get our English word "poem."

He has a plan and purpose for my time on earth. He is the master artist or sculptor, and He is the one who chooses the tools He will use to perfect His workmanship. What of suffering, then? What of illness? What of disability? Am I to tell Him which tools He can use and which tools He can't use in the lifelong task of perfecting me and molding me into the beautiful image of Jesus? Do I really know better than Him, so that I can state without equivocation that it's always His will to heal me of every physical affliction? If I am His poem, do I have the right to say, "No, Lord. You need to trim line number two and brighten up line three and five. They're just a little bit dark." Do I, the poem, the thing being written, know more

than the poet?  
p. 67

John MacArthur says this:

(Found: God's Will: Find the Direction and Purpose God Wants for Your Life by John MacArthur)

Do you see what the Spirit-filled life is? It is being saturated with the things of Christ with His Word, His Person.

You might say, "Well, you know I'd like that. I'd like to be saturated with Christ. How do I do that?"

The only way is to study the Book that discloses all He is!  
pp. 27-28

There are thirteen lessons that come out of this study.

**LESSON #1:** Are you growing in your relationship to Jesus Christ, just like He did recorded in Luke 2:52: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

**LESSON #2:** "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18 NASB).

**LESSON #3:** "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord" (1 Peter 2:2-3

NASB).

LESSON #4: The goal for growth is so that He might present you holy and without blemish and blameless before Him on that day of judgment.

LESSON #5: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 24, 25 NASB).

LESSON #6: The instrument of reconciliation for us is the body of His flesh. That’s why on that final night in the upper room he said “This is my body which is broken for you. This cup is my blood. Do this in remembrance of me.”

LESSON #7: Paul’s joy was not dependent upon outward circumstances. Outward pressures only crushed him closer to the heart of God. This can only be true if we are abiding in Him.

LESSON #8: These sufferings that Paul is enduring are also endured by Christ because of their relationship.

LESSON #9: “... ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’” In verse 5 he said: “And he said, ‘Who art Thou, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting’” (Acts 9:4 NASB).

LESSON #10: Paul describes his ministry in three ways: (1) suffering; (2) serving; and (3) speaking.

LESSON #11: Christ in us, the hope of glory, is the mystery that Paul is telling us about.

LESSON #12: Paul describes his public ministry around the words: proclaiming, admonishing, and teaching. The ultimate purpose is to present every man mature in Christ.

LESSON #13: Paul concludes with that glorious verse: “It is Christ in whom all the hidden treasures of the wisdom and knowledge are found” (Colossians 2:3 DAV). You can focus on Jesus Christ for all of God’s dealings with us.

Let’s go to 1 John 2 and let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart about your level of growth.

In 1 John 2, John describes **THREE LEVELS OF MATURITY**. He starts with little children, then he talks about young men and then about fathers. Listen to what he says:

1 John 2:14

I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning...

In other words, they’re mature. As fathers in Christ they have reproduced themselves, or the Spirit of God has produced Himself through them for others.

Continuing with verse 14 we read:

### 1 John 2:14

...I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

They are young men. They're strong, they're stout, they're steadfast. The Word of God is abiding in them so they're in the Word and they're growing.

But then 1 John 2:12 we read:

### 1 John 2:12

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for His name's sake.

That tells us there are levels of maturity. We're not asking you how long you've known Christ. We're not asking you how many churches you've joined. We're not asking you anything but:

What is your level of maturity that you bring to the table?

That is private. That's between you and the Spirit of God. But every moment that we live in the flesh, stifles and paralyzes the progress toward spiritual growth.

So if our lives have been selfish and centered on ourselves, then we're still playing with the burp, the bottle and the dirty britches. We haven't grown very much in our faith.

Father, thank You for Your Word. We ask again the Spirit of God to reveal to us the level of our own spirituality, our own maturity—where we are in the spectrum from the divine point of view. Thank You for Your love and grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

# A Practical Study of EPHESIANS

## HEAVEN'S PLAN for Life on Earth

### “What It’s Like Living According to God’s Plan”

Key verse 3:11b — *“Christ is all and in all.”*

#### STUDY NUMBER FOUR – MATURING IN CHRIST – COLOSSIANS 1:21-2:3

##### KEY VERSE 1:28

v. 21 And you who were at one time estranged and hostile in attitude, evil in your deeds,

v. 22 but now He reconciled in the body of His flesh through His death, in order that He might present you holy and without blemish and blameless before Him [on the day of Judgment]—

v. 23 if indeed you are continuing in the faith, having been founded and steadfast, and without shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, that gospel which was proclaimed in all creation which is under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

v. 24 Now I am rejoicing in my sufferings on your behalf, and I am filling up the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for the sake of His body, which is the church.

v. 25 Of which I became a servant according to the stewardship of God which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God,

v. 26 the mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations; but now made known to His saints,

v. 27 to whom God desired to make known what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

v. 28 Whom we are proclaiming, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, in order that we may present every man mature in Christ.

##### NOTES

## NOTES

v. 29 For which also I am toiling, striving according to (controlled by) His energy, which energy is operating in me in power.

2:v.1 For I am desiring you to know how great a struggle I am having in your behalf and those in Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face,

v. 2 in order that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and resulting in all wealth of the full assurance such as understanding brings, resulting in a thorough knowledge of the mystery of God,

v. 3 Christ, in whom are all the hidden treasures of the wisdom and knowledge.

## QUESTIONS:

1. Read Colossians 1:21-2:3 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

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2. How does Paul characterize the Colossians before they became Christians in verse 21?

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3. What is God's purpose in reconciling us unto Himself, according to verse 22?

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4. Explain the phrase “continuing in the faith” in verse 23.

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5. What was Paul’s attitude in his sufferings, according to verse 24?

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6. How is the mystery described in verse 27?

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7. What is Paul’s purpose in proclaiming Christ, according to verse 28?

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8. What is the purpose of knowing about the mystery of Christ, according to chapter 2:2?

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9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

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10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

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**LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:**

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

**LESSON #1:** Are you growing in your relationship to Jesus Christ, just like He did recorded in Luke 2:52: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

**LESSON #2:** “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18 NASB).

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