

Paul here identifies his mission: to preach the message, even though doing so took him to prison. He acknowledges his dependence on God for success. And he asks for the Colossians' assistance through prayer. Paul also draws the Colossians' attention to their own mission in relational evangelism.

Consider whose ministry you might pray for regularly, whether a person or an organization, whether in the field of evangelism, cross-cultural missions, or social concerns.

Consider also your mission, whether short-term (a year or two), or long-term (the remainder of your life). What has God put you here for? What is he calling you to do, whether inside the church, or outside, whether in the nurture of Christians, or in evangelism, cross-cultural missions, or social concerns. How are you contributing to God's mission?

Synthesis

Carry these five thoughts in mind, let them shape your life, share your progress with family and small group:

- (1) God-centered: How are you extending yourself in the service of Christ?
- (2) Bible-directed: What practices do you use to take in Scripture? How is your obedience faring?
- (3) Transformed: How are you different since becoming a Christian? What additional transformation do you seek from God?
- (4) Communal: Which communities are you part of, and how do you contribute to them?
- (5) Missional: What is God's calling for you right now, and what are you doing to carry out that calling?

Core Values: Synthesis

While the core values intend to direct our corporate church life and ministry, they also appropriately serve a comparable function for each of us individually.

The Indicative Precedes the Imperative

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ ... (Colossians 3:1)

Paul's letters generally begin with God, before turning to us. They begin with what God has done for us and in us, and only then, turn to what we shall do. This marks the difference between Christianity and other religions or moralities: primarily, it is about what God does by his power and in his grace; only secondarily is it about how we are to respond in love and obedience to him.

Meditate on this today: God has put us to death with Christ, and raised us to new life along with Christ. God has showered grace on us, at great cost to himself. Anything we do for him is in response to his overwhelming love for us, and his powerful work in us.

Value #1 God-Centered, not Self-Centered

Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:2-4)

If your life were centered on earthly things, in your present circumstances, what would receive the bulk of your time, effort and attention? What would your short-term goals be? Your long-term goals? Or, asked in another way, consider your peers, whether friends or colleagues: what receives the bulk of their attention? What are their short-term goals? Their long-term goals?

How is your use of time, your expenditure of effort, and the focus of your attention different from your past and from your friends, because you know Christ? Where do your priorities still need to change? Identify one difference that you can celebrate; identify one area where your priorities still need to change, with his help.

Value #2 Bible-Directed, not Culture-Directed

⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. ⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. (Colossians 2:6-8)

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

The church at Colossae was influenced by ideas imported from the surrounding culture, human philosophies, and competing religions. As a result, their concept of God was distorted, and their worship of God, corrupted. If you do not know any ways today that American culture, contemporary philosophies, and other religions are distorting Christians' concept of God and corrupting our worship, then likely you are an unwitting victim of those forces.

For the Colossians, the solution lay in returning to the faith they were taught in the gospel, and to soaking in the word of Christ, through disciplined study, mutual exhortation and biblically-sound worship. How are you currently using these avenues for intake of Scripture and application to your life? Are there areas where you need urgent improvement?

Value #3 Transformed, not just Forgiven

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:5-10)

'Not perfect, just forgiven'? Paul recognizes that Christians are not

perfect, but he does not let us off on the grounds that we are 'just forgiven'. Instead, we have put off the old self, we have put on the new self, and we are being renewed in God's image.

Review the list of sins in this passage. Is there a sin which you have grown out of, for which you can thank God? Is there one particular area in which you need to make urgent progress?

Value #4 Communal, not Individualistic

¹¹Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. (Colossians 3:11-15)

Paul captures many features of Christian community in this one passage: (1) diversity of culture, religious background, ethnicity, and social class; (2) unity; (3) positive relationships with each other; and, (4) forgiveness in the case of negative interactions. Or, at least this is his goal; if it were actually like this in all respects, he would not need to exhort the church.

In what ways are your interactions at church suitably marked by: (1) diversity, (2) unity, (3) positive relationships, (4) forgiveness. Identify one of these areas that you might work on improving, and a specific improvement that you could work toward this year.

Value #5 Missional, not Consumeristic

Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

⁴Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ⁵Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Colossians 4:2-6)