

Holiness is a Group Project

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Date: 17 September 2023

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[0 : 00] skill skill All right, how are we?

Doing good? We ready? All right, if you've got a Bible, go Colossians chapter 3. Colossians chapter 3 is where we're going to be this evening. Last week, we started kind of a short series that we're looking at in the month of September just called Vision.

We're essentially looking at our vision and strategy here at Faith Family and kind of our approach to ministry. And one of the things that I talked about last week is that we intentionally here at Faith Family take a very simple approach to ministry.

We do that on purpose. In fact, last week I said this. Notice it here on the screen. I'm sorry, I didn't put this on the screen, so this is my fault. So, is that Christ is to be your life, the church isn't.

Christ is to be your life, the church isn't. And I don't know if you grew up in the context I did, but the context I grew up in, the church wanted to be your life.

[1 : 37] It wanted to occupy the majority of your week, the majority of your schedule. So you were constantly in Bible studies and programs and events and serving on committees and rather than Christ being your life, the church became your life.

And our approach is very different. We want a simple model of church so that you can live your life for Christ throughout your week and not be consumed in religious activity.

I quoted from Dr. Tom Rainer last week in a book called The Simple Life. This week, in fact, a friend of mine from Faith Family sent me this, sent me this text this week from A.W. Tozer.

You ever read The Pursuit of God? A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God? In that book, Tozer writes this and totally agree with it. Listen closely. Every age has its own characteristics.

Right now, we are in an age of religious complexity. The simplicity which is in Christ is rarely found among us.

[2 : 37] In its stead, our programs and methods and organizations and a world of nervous activities which occupy time and attention but never satisfy the longing of the heart.

The shallowness of our inner experience, the hollowness of our worship, the imitation of the world which marks our promotional methods, all testify that we in this day know God only imperfectly and the peace of God scarcely at all.

I resonate with that quote that we're living in an age of religious complexity and simplicity which is in Christ is rarely found among us.

So listen, Christ is to be your life. The church is not. And our approach at Faith Family is simple. In fact, what we've been talking about, first of all, our vision statement is we simply want people to encounter God and experience grace through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We want you to encounter God, experience his life-changing grace, and that happens in and only in the good news of Jesus Christ. That's what we're all about.

[3 : 51] And the way we carry out that vision is through a very simple strategy. We want you to be at a gathering, be in a group, and live out the gospel. Be in a gathering, be in a group, and live out the gospel.

Aren't you relieved that it's like we don't want you to serve on 15 committees? Right? How many of you are pro-serving on committees? Please don't raise your hand, all right? No, we want you to be at a gathering because we believe that this is important.

What we're doing right now, we talked about that last week in week one. We also want you to be in biblical community. That's what we're going to talk about tonight. And we also want you to live out the gospel.

And so that is why we take the vision and strategy that we do here at Faith Family. I hope that is a breath of fresh air to you because I will tell you as someone who's been in this for over 25 years,

this is a breath of fresh air.

That the church doesn't want to be my life. Jesus is my life. Let's look now at Colossians chapter 3, our main text this evening. And if you're able to stand, please do so as we honor the reading of God's word.

[4 : 58] Colossians chapter 3 and verse 12. The Apostle Paul writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit this. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bearing with one another. And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.

Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. Giving thanks to God the Father through him.

[6 : 17] What a beautiful, beautiful passage of scripture. Let's pray and ask God to teach us this evening from it. God, thank you for this time to gather under the authority of your word.

Help us understand from what your apostle wrote to the church at Colossae, that we this evening would be edified and strengthened in these words of what biblical community is ultimately about.

So help us, give us minds and hearts to receive your truth this evening. In Jesus' name we pray. In God's people said, amen. Amen. You can be seated.

I'm not often speechless. I figured you'd laugh at that. I'm not often speechless, but I was that night. This actually happened. It's been several years ago. But one evening I was kind of scanning through the TV channels at night and I came across something that shocked me and disturbed me both at the same time and for different reasons.

It was a call-in talk show host that was running this program and she looked to be like this 80 year old woman giving advice.

[7 : 28] The thing is, she wasn't giving advice on how to bake a cake. She wasn't giving advice on how to make a quilt. This like elderly, sweet looking, grandmotherly figure was giving people advice about sex.

I'm not making this up, right? And what was strange is that people from all different ages and all different backgrounds would call into this TV program and they would just share their struggles and share their experiences and ask for help in that area of their life.

My first reaction to this was just total shock. Like I couldn't even believe this was on basic cable. But then what struck me is that these people calling in weren't freaks.

They weren't trying to be dirty. They weren't trying to be perverted. What they were doing was searching. They wanted someone, even a television talk show host, that they could share their struggles with.

They wanted to know that they were not alone in the world. That when it came to their deepest and most intimate issues of their life, they were not strange.

[8 : 48] And the truth of the matter is, Faith Family, within every single human heart, there is this desire to know that the things that I struggle with, the things that I deal with, the deep struggles of my life, I'm not alone in that.

I'm not alone in the world. It's why everybody to one degree or another seeks community, that they try to find some type of connection with some type of group.

And it might be basic things like Taylor Swift fans dressing up in their favorite Taylor Swift outfits going to a concert. That would not be me, all right, for a variety of reasons.

It might be a political rally where all these people are coming together supporting the candidate that they align with. It might be Harry Potter fans who are all just weird, right?

So it could be like sports fans that are all coming together supporting their favorite team. It happens in barber shops where men get together and they talk about fishing and they talk about sports and they talk about politics.

[9 : 54] It might be women that come together at the beauty shop and talk about whatever it is that y'all talk about. I wouldn't even begin to know what that is, right? It could be social communities

online where you have Facebook followers and Twitter followers and that's a way in which you seek community or it might be the neighborhood bar.

You can sing along if you want. Takes everything you've got. Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot.

Wouldn't you like to get away? Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name. And they're always glad you came. You want to be where you can see the troubles are all the same. You want to be where everybody knows your name.

You want to go where we will know people are all the same. You want to go where everybody knows your name.

[11:15] You'll be humming that the rest of the night, won't you, right? I was going to do Toby Keith's I Love This Bar, but I decided to go old school because I know some of you love old school, but we get that, right?

I mean, famous pastor Chuck Swindoll writes the following, quote, the neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit to fellowship with Christ, the kind of fellowship that Christ wants us to have in the church.

It's an imitation dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality. But it's a permissive, accepting, inclusive fellowship.

You can tell people secrets and they usually don't tell others. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved.

So many people seek a counterfeit. That's what's happening on that call-in show. That's what's happening in the neighborhood bar. That's what's happening at the barbershops and beauty salons.

[12:26] People seeking community. Because the truth is, Faith Family, every single one of us who has been created in the image of the triune God was created to belong, was created to experience community, but we need more than a barbershop.

We need biblical community. And that is exactly what Paul is addressing here to this church in Colossians chapter 3. In fact, look at the concern that Paul has for these believers back in verse 5. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, which is idolatry. Now look at verse 8. Verse 8 says, And look at verse 9.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices. In other words, the first thing you see here is Paul has a concern, and his concern is spiritual growth.

He's saying here to these believers, there are things that every one of you need to put off, just like there are things that every single one of us needs to put off. Every single one of us in this place tonight, listening online, has attitudes or actions or thoughts or addictions that we are to put away, that we are to put off.

[13:54] And not just are we to have things that we put off, but Paul says there's also things you are to put on. Look at verse 12. So put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience.

So he's saying there are things in your life to put off, and there are things in your life that you are to cultivate and develop and put on. And this isn't just something that you do one time, and then you're finished for good.

No, it is an ongoing process that you are battling and fighting to grow spiritually. Look at what he says in verse 10. He says, and have put on the new self, which is being what?

Renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. In other words, we are being renewed. We're not one time renewed, done, finished, never to grow again.

No, this is an ongoing process from the moment that we accept Christ to grow in him. And that means putting off the things that do not image him and putting on the things that do.

[15:09] Amen? That's the concern Paul has for these believers in Colossae. He wants them to grow spiritually. Recognizing that their holiness is something that is an ongoing process.

It is something that they are to be striving for. Now, the big biblical word that many of you would know, but maybe some of you don't, the big biblical word for this would be sanctification. Paul is essentially saying, I want your sanctification.

I want your growth in Christ. To understand the difference between justification and sanctification, justification is a one-time event.

It happens the very moment that we accept Christ. Sanctification is something that is ongoing throughout our walk with Christ. Do you see?

Justification is our legal standing before God. It's what God sees. It's our standing before him. Sanctification is our living that out.

[16:09] You can think about it simply like this. This is a simplistic definition, but justification is about who you are, and sanctification is about what you do. So it would go like this.

You are, if you're a Christian, you are holy, so live in holiness. You are a child of God, justified. Live in imitation of your father, sanctification. Do you see? You are the very righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, so live righteously.

Do you see? That's what Paul's talking about. He's saying, my concern is for your growth, that you would put off things and put on things, that you would be renewed in the image of your creator.

And this emphasis of spiritual growth is not just found here in Colossians 3, but everywhere throughout the New Testament. 1 Timothy chapter 4, train yourself for godliness because it holds promise for the present life and the life to come.

[17:15] Ephesians 4, we're to no longer be children, but to grow up. Philippians 3, we are to press on and strive to know Christ more.

1 Thessalonians 4, this is God's will for you, sanctification. 1 Peter chapter 2, long for the pure milk that you may grow up in salvation.

Now stop for a minute and think about that. We tend to think of salvation of what happened the moment we put faith in Christ. And that's true. But Paul is saying you are saved, justification, and you're to grow up in your salvation, sanctification.

So your salvation isn't a one-time thing. It happened in the past. It'll be ultimately fulfilled in the future. And in the present, you're growing in it.

You're making process and striving towards that goal. It's like Picasso when he was a young artist. Those of you that know painting, Picasso painted a very specific kind of painting known as realism.

[18:22] It would look something like this. And on one occasion, he drew a painting of a young woman by the name of Gertrude Stein. But the thing is, she was really young.

And he painted the picture as an old woman. When Gertrude saw the painting, she said, I don't look that way. That's not how I look.

And Picasso said, no, but you will. That's where you're going. That's where you're progressing. And many of us would say, Pastor, and including your pastor, there are many things in my life that do not look like Jesus.

I don't reflect Jesus in every way. Amen? Amen. There was a good place for an amen, and you missed it. Would we just all testify? Listen, I don't look like that.

Amen? Amen. But you will. But you will. Because he that began the work in you will complete it on the final resurrection day.

[19:28] You are headed towards a complete project. And the good news is, it's not dependent upon your strength to get you there. The one who started that work in you will bring it to completion.

You don't look like that now, but you will. You will. That's Paul's concern here, is for the spiritual growth of these believers. But he doesn't just address his concern for spiritual growth.

Look at the content of this growth, verse 15. He says this, So he gives the content of this spiritual growth.

That is the very thing that helps bring this about. That is the word of God dwelling in us richly. It doesn't just happen magically.

It happens through the word of God entering in us and dwelling in us. You know what it means to dwell in something, right? How many of you, show of hands, have ever moved into a home?

[20:36] Anybody? Show of hands? Okay. How many of you, show of hands, hate moving? And all God's people said, amen. I think one of the greatest challenges to holiness is moving, right?

If you have ever had to move, you know you can, I don't believe you can lose your salvation, but you come close when you're having to move into a home. But you know it works like this. When you show up into that new home, it's empty, right?

It's just a bunch of boxes and a bunch of empty rooms, right? But over time, you begin to have those things where you can dwell in your home.

That is, you take ownership of that home and it happens over time. Are you with me? Say yes. You don't just walk in day one and dwell there, but over time, as things are unpacked, you get to a place

where you dwell.

In other words, Paul is saying, think of your life as a home. The word of God needs to dwell in every room. Listen, this is what people, can I just preach for a minute, right?

[21 : 40] This is what people so often get wrong about being a Christian. How many of you have ever heard somebody say, well, as soon as I can straighten up a few things about my life, then I'll be a Christian, right?

I kind of need to get some things in order. It's like, listen, sweetheart, that's not how it works. It's not about the moment that you get saved. Every room in your life is totally sanctified.

No, you're a total mess. Your house is a mess. And every room is a mess. But the goal is to let the word of God dwell in the home of your life where eventually you grow in Christ.

You begin to look like Christ. And some of you still have a garage that's really, really messy. But the living room sure looks better. We have areas in our life that are not quite there that we are struggling.

And Paul is saying the way that we grow is that the word of God dwells in you richly. That is, in every room, every cabinet, every corner, even in the basement, the attic, the crawl space, the garage.

[22 : 51] I'm probably leaving some parts of the home out, but you get the point. Every, every, every room. And as that happens, you are renewed in the image of your creator.

So if you want to grow, the word of Christ has to take ownership in every room so that your home looks like a place where Christ dwells. And can we all just acknowledge we are all growing.

We are all growing. There is no one, no one in this room whose home looks perfect. You're still a mess. I'm still a mess.

And Paul says, I understand that. You need the word of Christ to dwell in you richly. So you might say, well then, okay, I need to sign up for a bunch of more Bible studies.

And I need to have a two hour long quiet time in the morning. I need the word of Christ to dwell in me. So I'm going to download a bunch more sermons. And try to read some books about the Bible.

[23 : 52] And it's just content, content, content, content. That's not what Paul says. The content must be there. But look at what he says in verse 13. Bearing with, say it, one another.

And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. How? As the Lord has forgiven you. So you also should, no, must forgive.

And above all of these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing, say it, one another. In all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts towards God.

In other words, what's the context of which this spiritual growth takes place? And it's one another. The emphasis here is not, hey, man, go download.

[25 : 05] Paul's not saying, go download all my sermons on iTunes, right? Or, man, you really should just go listen to Peter for a while. No, he's saying, listen, biblical content is important.

The word of God must dwell in you richly. But the context in which this happens is community. Relationships. One another.

Listen, how are you going to practice the gospel, which has at its core forgiveness, if you're by yourself? I mean, you could say, well, I could forgive myself.

Yeah, but you have to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven you. You cannot simply do this alone. Notice this on the screen, Faith Family. Here's the point.

Holiness is a group project. Holiness is a group project. It is not a single person assignment. It is something that must be done in some type of group or community.

[26 : 04] You cannot grow the way you need to grow. And so that is why Jesus gave you the church. C.S. Lewis wrote this, quote, Let me read that again.

Christ works on us in all sorts of ways. But above all, above all of those ways, he works on us through one another.

And so things like love and forgiveness and kindness assumes relationships. It assumes belonging. And listen, there is no way. This is why we talk about groups, and I'll talk more about this in just a little bit.

It's why we ask you to not just be at a gathering, but also be in a group. And groups look different in Faith Family. Because the reality is, even with this size of a gathering, there is no way this entire group is going to be able to experience the kind of community that Paul is talking about in Colossians 3.

So listen to me. This might be two brothers. This might be 15 people meeting in a home. This might be a men's group meeting on a Monday night. It's going to look different.

[27 : 24] But the question is, are you experiencing in one way or another biblical community? Because your holiness depends on it. Your sanctification depends on it.

It happens with one another. Here are just a few benefits of biblical community, and then we'll wrap it up. The first is biblical application. Biblical application.

When Paul writes these, put off these things and put on these things, he is assuming action. He expects these believers to do this, to act on this, to be doers of these commands.

In fact, James, the brother of Jesus, says in James 1.22, Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. So we are to put forth effort in putting off things and putting on things.

And in biblical community, we secondly get personal accountability. That is, we have the opportunity to apply the very thing we've been commanded to do.

[28 : 28] It's why he says in verse 16, teaching one another. Admonishing one another.

Encouraging one another. It gives us the idea of, you are to put on these things and put off these things.

And I'm here as a loving brother. I'm here as a loving sister to help you do that. I am for your good. I am for your growth. Amen?

Amen? It's like the California redwood trees. The tallest trees in the world. 300 feet high. 2,500 years old.

And you would think that trees of that enormous size, and some of you already know this, would have like deep, deep root systems. Okay, not root. It's pronounced root. Just so you know, right? Deep, deep roots. Deep roots. But if you know anything about the redwood trees, they don't have deep roots. They have a shallow root system that are intertwined with all of the other trees.

[29 : 30] And that's a beautiful picture of how growing tall and growing in Christ happens in community. It's not because you alone are really, really deep and really, really special.

It's intertwined with other believers. You can grow the way God wants you to grow. That's a beautiful picture of what God has called us to be in community.

Paul Tripp writes this, quote, Let me read that again.

That's what Paul is talking about, of admonishing and encouraging and loving one another.

And then thirdly, why biblical community matters is, as I mentioned, gospel participation. In verse 14, Paul talks about love. The greatest of these is love, 1 Corinthians 13.

[30 : 52] Forgiveness, kindness. These are all the things that Christ has done for us in the gospel, which means when we love one another, when loving is hard, when we forgive one another, when it is very difficult to forgive, we're not, listen, we're not just doing a good thing.

We're doing a gospel thing. Again, participation in the very gospel that we have experienced happens in relationships, when we forgive as Christ has forgiven us.

Tim Keller writes this, quote, the late Tim Keller says, Community is more than just the result of preaching the gospel. It is itself an expression of the gospel.

For the good news is this. This is what Christ has won for you on the cross is a new life together with the people of God.

It's not just preaching the gospel, as important as that is, but the expression of the gospel as we live that out in the context of one another.

[31 : 59] I close with this, just a few things that would keep us from experiencing the spiritual growth that the Lord would have for us here in Colossians 3. So some constraints to that.

A few things quickly is individualism, right? It's the idea of, listen, I can figure this out on my own. It's a do-it-yourself culture. You just kind of think, listen, I will take care of my own sanctification.

Good luck with that. And so that kind of individualism is the very opposite of what Paul is calling us here to. Pride, that is, I don't really need any help.

I don't really need other people. Fear, this is a big one. This is a big one. Maybe you're afraid to be known. You've been hurt in the past. And so there's a fear of opening yourself up.

Priority in time, that is, sometimes we just, we find it, we're too busy to be involved in other people's lives. Or it's tradition. A lot of times it's just like, this is not how we do it at church, right?

[33 : 02] We do programs, not true community. But whatever it is for you this evening, I want us to consider Colossians 3. That our growth, our holiness is a group project.

It's a community project. Not with a group this size, but with a small group. It could be, again, three or four men that you connect with. It might be a women's group.

It might be a co-ed group. But in one way or another, being with one another. That's what Colossians 3 is all about. So listen, I close with this.

If there is anybody, anybody, anybody, anybody who could have done it alone, who do you think it could have been? Jesus. If anybody could have done it alone, it would have been Jesus.

And yet, at the center of Jesus' life and ministry, on earth was this. A small group. A group of men he did life with.

[34 : 02] A group of men that he shared ministry with. And a group of men he loved so much, he was willing to lay down his life and die for.

So in a world where people are longing for belonging and acceptance, but they're looking for it in all the wrong places, God has given us and called us to something more.

A place where you can get better advice than sex talk with Sue. Deeper friendship than a computer screen. And a place where somebody knows your name.

And they're always glad you came. And it's not a bar. It's community. Where the word of God dwells. And all God's people said, amen.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for your word to us. It certainly does convict us. We in a very individualistic society want to often disconnect from others.

[35 : 03] And I understand that. But thank you for passages like Colossians 3 that show us the one another's. That the things that we're to grow in, like love and kindness and forgiveness and patience, these are things we can't learn alone.

But they happen through teaching one another, encouraging one another, worshiping with one another, being with one another. So I do pray that we would put aside any notions of small group ministries or programs and really think about biblical community.

What are those relationships in my life where I am being encouraged to love and good works? To put off these things and put on these things.

And I pray that tonight that you would guide us in finding, if we do not already have it, that place of community and belonging. That we might be renewed in the image of our creator.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 24]