

Loving God's Church

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[0 : 0 0] Well, happy December, everyone. Thank you. Thank you. Had to be from my friend from Ontario who knows proper sermon etiquette.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Colossians. As the children are going to spend some time learning about the life of Paul, we're going to learn about the teachings of Paul and what he has for us.

As you're looking up Colossians 2, last week if you were here, I shared some thoughts on membership. And I'm very grateful that several of you have indicated further interest on the subject.

So just so you know, in January we're going to have a couple of classes. So please take the time, let Stephanie know so we can set that time more. More than likely it'll be on a Sunday, kind of after church.

We'll have a lunch together and we'll talk some of these things through. Although I started with December, I'm already talking about January in the new year, right? Where does time go? But one of the points that I made is that membership is about uniting ourselves with the body of Christ.

[1 : 2 1] It is a submission to a local body that meets with a known group of people. The leaders were known, the people were known, the needs of the people were known.

And I would say more importantly, the spiritual gifts were known as each ministered according to the gift that God had dispensed through the power of the Holy Spirit to his people.

And one of the important points is that we are all responsible for one another. And together we're also responsible for our collective witness.

That the idea of membership, one of the primary functions is the affirmation of our faith. That our faith is true and right before the Lord God Almighty.

But before this community upon we live in. It is the church itself that authenticates us as Christians.

[2 : 1 8] That means we are to be known. To be involved in each other's lives, the community, the intimacy. So this morning I want to look at Paul's words in the book of Colossians and the encouragement he offered to that church.

And we will see that that same teaching is just as relevant as it is today. Today, my prayer and hope is that you will find that the encouragement that he offers that church is not just applicable to someone who is outside of the church.

You're going to see as I was talking about last week, that the idea of membership and known throughout the church permeates the entire New Testament. It's not a new idea.

So when people say, hey, where's membership in the Bible? We're looking at the idea of membership incorrectly like it's some kind of club. The idea that God has always taught from the beginning, it's to be a known group of people that are committed to one another.

So just by way of context, the book of Colossians is actually a very sweet letter. It's a letter that is written by Paul to a group of believers who are kind of in this city that's off the beaten track.

[3 : 35] Paul was in Ephesus at the time. And we believe church history tells us that there was a man named Epaphras was in Ephesus. And he heard Paul preach the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And he believed. And as he believed that gospel, he went back home and shared this gospel with his friends and family. The incredible story of Jesus Christ who came to earth, which we celebrate now at Christmas, and how he bled and he died for us to save us from our sins.

And the people believed. And they came together as a group. And they began worshipping together and functioning as a church, as a family.

Now as the family started growing, the church body started growing, questions arose. Issues came up, as they often do in gatherings.

So Paul received Epaphras. So Epaphras went back to Paul and said, Hey, we got some issues. And that's when Paul penned this letter to this church.

[4 : 44] And he actually gave Epaphras two letters. The other letter we read is the letter to Philemon, who served in the church of Colossae.

So this is the context of this letter. So let me just read the first seven verses that we have here, beginning in verse 1, Colossians 2.

And these are Paul's words to this church. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face.

So we believe that these people do not know Paul, but they know about Paul. He's never had a chance to visit. We know Paul's heart would have been at some place to visit them. But as a man, he can't be in all places at once.

So usually he sends his disciples. So he hasn't even met them. So he have not seen me face to face. But that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance, of understanding, and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom all are hidden, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

[5 : 56] Verse 4. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. And the reason why he's making that statement is that when we have holes in our faith, we usually rely on our past or history to fill in those holes.

And so when they had questions, people who were a part of the church were bringing in their beliefs that they had before Jesus.

You with me on that? So there was a level of syncretism. And in the Roman Empire, all religions were accepted. You could worship any god except Jesus Christ.

And we learned about this later. What we learn later on is that because of the exclusivity of Jesus. Right? We studied this a couple of years ago.

A couple of weeks ago. Right? I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes the Father but through me. That became an entirely offensive statement. Just as it is today.

[7 : 06] It was back then. So people kept using these other plausible arguments, deluding them. Most of them came from a Jewish background, which had a lot of high mysticism and kind of a lot of the same stuff that we see today here in Squamish.

For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see you, your good order, and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

So this morning, I want to look at four qualities that God, through the Apostle Paul, wants for us as a church. And I think it begins to sink very easy with an understanding of membership and what it is to be a part of the church.

However, before I go any further, let's just go to the Lord in prayer with this. Dear Holy Heavenly Father, we just thank you for your message that has endured over 2,000 years to us that was preached to a church that doesn't exist anymore.

[8 : 29] This city does not even exist anymore. Wiped out by time. But the message that you brought to these sweet folks, these brothers and sisters that we do not know, but face many of the same trials and tribulations as humans do, may it be as relevant to us as it was to them.

May we understand that Paul's heart for them would be the same heart that he'd have for us today. Father, I pray that just as we hear these words, we would submit to these words.

May these words move our hearts to be mindful of who we are before you, that we are indeed children of the living God, that we have a Savior who died for us, who lived a life that we could not live, so that we could have peace with God the Father.

So Father, as we come to these principles, I pray that they would speak to our hearts, that we would see the truth that is hidden within them, and we would be mindful of these things.

We ask these things in most gracious and glorious name. Amen. So one of the first desires that Paul has for this church, which I believe is the same desire that he has for us this day, is found in verse 2, and is that God wants us strong in heart.

[9 : 57] God wants us strong in heart. If you notice in verse 2, it says that their hearts may be encouraged. Now, you know I've used that word heart.

That heart is the inner self. That is the place which makes you you, kind of the center of your DNA or your CPU if you were a computer. It is where all the input comes in and it sends its messages throughout the body for us to work and to function.

So it has a sense of our inner being. He's not talking about an emotional center. You know, we hand out our Valentine's cards and a little heart, right? It's not that. So in the Jewish understanding, it meant your truest, authentic type of form.

And that word encouraged, the original meaning of the word is to be called alongside. And I think this is an interesting word. As an example, when a parent is to encourage his child or her child there to come alongside the child to instruct them, so it's a picture of coming beside someone and helping them in life.

So in this context, Paul is coming alongside this church to strengthen them up. Listen, I feel like when I share this, I'm revealing that I'm giving in to, you'll make sense in the world.

[11 : 42] Like, who doesn't like sports movies, right? But did you know sports movies are pretty much all the same, right? You notice, there is no big sports movie about a team that goes in the tournament and they blow out every team.

There's no problem. And then they're the champions. No. Every movie has the same trope. You know, in that championship game after the first half, they're a little bit weak, they're run down, and someone's got to spark the team, eh?

Whether it's a coach or another player, hey, we can do this, right? And that's kind of what's going on here. And the coach isn't calling on some special power that they did not have.

Every movie is a coach or a player saying we can do this because we've been taught this. We know this because we've done this before. We know how to run our plays.

We know how to pass the puck. Whatever sport you're talking about, it's the same thing. They always talk about you go back to basics or whatever, right?

[12 : 49] So what Paul is doing, it's in the movies, they don't give out chocolate to everybody to make them feel better before the last quarter, right? No, there's a truth.

And the truth is you know what you can do, and now it's the time. If you trust in what you know and what you can do, you will win, right?

That's really what it's all about, right? And Paul understands that they're struggling. And often the way in our Christian times, whether it be tough times where we're facing discouragement, perhaps it could be as serious as friends defecting, relationships falling apart, the personal struggle of dealing with our own sin, or it's just the reality that life is sometimes hard.

We usually need someone to come alongside. That's what Paul's doing. He's going to come alongside. I'm going to strengthen your heart. Because what had happened to this church is that what happens is when you don't have faith, you doubt.

You doubt. Did I learn what was really true? Did Jesus really die for me? Does Jesus even love me? Does Jesus even know who I am, right?

[14 : 05] Like these are all the same kind of things that Satan does. And churches have enemies too. And here in the book of Colossians to this church in Colossae, there were people coming in and teaching another gospel, which we will get through in a moment too.

However, what Paul is reminding them that God wants them and us strong in heart to be strengthened. We need to know and we need to recall God's truth.

We need to recall God's promises. The reality is when we give in to emotions, it can go in all sorts of directions. But the more our minds are reinforced with the truth of the gospel, the easier it is to control one's emotions.

One of the biggest issues that people always face is what will others think? How would they respond to how I'm dealing with this issue? Some may have been getting discouraged, giving up hope, wondering if their faith is real.

The other weapon that Satan uses is confusion. But what Paul is saying, you need to be strengthened with what you know. You see, when our minds are filled with biblical truth, our emotions will respond properly.

[15 : 31] And the fact is, we are to give our guidance to our hearts in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. Did you know that? We're actually supposed to guard our hearts.

A lot of people use that almost in a dating or a love type situation. That's actually not what the context is. It's guarding your hearts from falsehood, from wrong teaching.

Psalms 26, 2 says, Prove me, O Lord, and try me. Test my heart and my mind. Psalm 139, verses 23, 24, the psalmist writes, Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me and know my thoughts. You see that there's that linking between the heart and the thinking. And see if there be any grievous way in me.

And he says, And lead me in the way of understanding. So if you try me, and you find there's error, wrong thinking, lead me to truth. Get me out of this hole, this pit, this wrong place that I am in.

[16 : 41] You see, what fills your heart will come out in your behavior. That is why Jesus Christ, when he challenged those that came against him in Matthew 12, 34, said, How can you speak good when you are evil?

For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good person, out of his good treasure, brings forth good.

And the evil person, out of his evil treasure, brings forth evil. So if you want to know, what are the designs of your heart? What's coming out of your mouth?

What are you complaining? Who are you complaining to? Are you attacking? Are you negative? Do you find more curse words than words of blessing? Are they words of frustrations?

Are they words of love? And then Ephesians 3, 16 says, That according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened, there's that word again, with power through his spirit in your inner being.

[17 : 51] Because as Paul will later remind us, and he defines the Christian life so wonderfully or so painfully in 2 Corinthians 4, 8, he says, We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed.

Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed. Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Isn't that wild? That's the reality of what we faith. No matter the hardships that we go through or the frustrations we may be feeling in life, we need to be mindful that there is a manifestation of Jesus in our lives, and then we know the command that we are to encourage one another.

Luke 22, 32 says, But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. You see, God always wants those who worship him to have a strong heart.

Recently, I just spent some time with an old friend when I was in Ontario, and they told me a little bit about their struggles that they had been going to, and I hadn't talked to this person for a good 20 years, and their Christian life has been a sad de-evolution of where they once were, and it was all based on a lie that what they believed, that what God said or stated, and it was the easiest fruit to challenge because they said, well, let's just look in Scripture.

[19 : 35] Notice it said something totally different, what they were believing, and immediately, there was hope that they had believed that God in the Old Testament was a cruel God, and they were struggling.

Could I worship God? And they actually cited Moses' dealing with Pharaoh as the example, and I said, do you know that story? Do you know how God's patience and loving kindness with Pharaoh, like he brought the one plague first, he called them to repent, then he brought a plague, and he gave them like 10 times the opportunity to change and to turn because he was doing horrible things to God's people.

So that's the first thing. God wants us to strengthen our hearts. He wants us to come together because there is a reality of life which we struggle with, and no one's immune to this struggle, the frustration, the tiredness.

It's kind of a bad thing to be teaching before Christmas, isn't it, right? I'm already warning you guys, you're going to be tired. The other thing that Paul is speaking to and that God wants for us is he wants us united, but he just doesn't want us united in our pain.

He wants us to be united in love. Colossians 2, 2, that their hearts may be encouraged being knit together in love.

[20 : 55] We know what knitting is, right? Some people have got old people in their homes that knit together. I'm just kidding. My wife's now mad at me and I'm not getting dinner for the next week.

But anyway, knitting is bringing two things together to hold. In fact, the root term is almost welded together, right?

So to be united is to be formed as a whole, that we are to be knit together. And the text is that love is the necessary balance to having a strong mind.

You got that? Love is the balance to a strong mind. We're not talking about mindless enthusiasm or lifeless orthodoxy. That's why we always talk about love and grace, God's mercy, and God's justice.

They're these combines to come together to make one. Colossians 2, 19, Paul will later remind the saints, he says, And what he's talking about there is that Jesus Christ is the head and you and I, we're not just knit together, we're knit together to the head that is Jesus Christ.

[22 : 14] That is he who makes us whole. He's what gives us our body, our life, our understanding of who we are. As anyone who is married knows, that love is an action.

It's never a feeling. It is a decision to be made. It doesn't mean that person is hard to love, but you know who's really easy to love?

Us. Right? We are. It's easy to love ourselves. It's easy to get things for ourselves. It's easy to want time for ourselves.

But we have to make that conscious decision that we have other people in our life and that we have to love them more than us. Right? So we share a common life with love as its basis.

It's the same with eternal life. All come to Christ in the same way. We are all placed in the body of Christ by the same Spirit when we become citizens of God.

[23 : 22] If you want to turn with me briefly to John 17, and I'll be preaching on this sometimes, hopefully, before 2025. But, John 17, this is the high priestly prayer.

This is the last prayer before he goes before the cross. And I said, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be even, they may be one, even as we are one. So the model of our unity is based on Jesus Christ being united with the Father.

Isn't that wonderful? That's perfect. You can't find a better example of what true unity and love is. But that's what he's, this is Jesus petitioning the Father, I pray that this church that I'm dying for, these people would be united in one.

In fact, like I said in verse 22, the glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you loved me.

[24 : 56] The Christian thinker and apologist Francis Schaeffer simply wrote, if an individual Christian does not show love toward other true Christians, the world has a right to judge that he or she is not a Christian.

Sadly, in my journey, I have met many pastors that love the Lord but hate their sheep. Right? They love God, they know the theology, they know the orthodoxy, but have no care or heart for the people that they serve.

See, here in John 17, Jesus is stating something else which is far more cutting, more profound, which is we cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.

And the other thing is, love, and how is that processed? I just simply have written this point, love is always linked to humility. Loving people are always humble people.

Paul reminds the saints in Philippians 2, 3, do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

[26 : 27] Because that's the antidote for the me love, right? It's easy to love me, but when I count you greater than myself, it is you who I honor, not me.

You see, a strength in heart is a heart that has learned to love. The fourth element or the fourth principle that Paul calls for and that God wants for us is that he wants us settled in our understanding.

He wants us settled in our understanding. I want you to see this in Colossians 2, verses 2 through 5. It says, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love.

And you notice he gives us the reason here. to reach all the riches of full assurance and understanding. Isn't that an interesting word? To reach.

Like there's a process that he wants us to to be able to reach all the riches, not some of the riches or part of the riches or only the riches that you deserve.

[27 : 37] He actually wants for you all the riches of full assurance, of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery. And the God's mystery, which is Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

See, the reason why he's bringing up this idea of mystery is that cults, false religions, usually rely on inviting you in so you can understand secret knowledge.

that you can understand the real ways of God. And if you join us, we will teach you them. And that's what was going on. A lot of mysticism was coming over the church and Paul was saying, hey, you know what?

You just need to know Jesus. Everything is found in Jesus Christ alone. There is no, if you know anything about Scientology, like there's these levels that you have to progress.

No, no, no. You're a Christian. You're at the top. There is no more. Of course, there's more understanding. We're going to get to that. That helps us grow and mature in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 47] But there's nothing secret to know outside of the gospel. There's nothing more you need to know. You see, there's a temptation and cults pray on this that we are tempted to have something other, something to make us feel better, feel more special.

Christianity, sometimes, they believe in asceticism. If I live a certain way of life that's really clean, very simple, only wear white, you know, just different things.

If I only eat certain types of food, if I don't go to certain types of places, I'm more clean than the other person. Well, Jesus didn't teach that. There are no secret foods to eat, no secret clothes to wear, no secret actions to do.

Paul simply states all wisdom, all knowledge is found completely in Jesus Christ. The world wants us to hold to man's wisdom, what the world thinks is religious.

religious. But Paul wants them assured that is all and everything is found in Jesus Christ. Why?

[30 : 11] Hey, who's investing today? There's no such thing as a real confident investor today. Did you know that? Nobody. I get these emails, nobody knows what's going on.

Financial markets are all over the place. People cannot trust that. Guess what Jesus Christ offers? The complete opposite. Full knowledge. Full understanding.

And he wants them assured that when someone becomes, say, a member of the church, that word I used last week was the word embassy.

It's an understanding that we have this citizenship that God has granted to us by being children of God. We are part of this family. You can't take it away.

You're assured in that. To be a Christian and not to be assured of heaven, of the new earth, that Jesus is coming again, is kind of an anthem.

[31 : 13] It's two opposites that cannot exist. To be a Christian is to have confidence that Jesus is coming again for us.

It is what we live for. If we really, if we weren't confident in that, then this whole Christian thing is just really some sort of moral doctrine to make us feel better about ourselves.

Paul, in another place, states that if Jesus really didn't die and Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, we are to be pitied.

But he gave his life for this message that he believes is true, is real. This is why we have a statement of faith.

Do you know that our statement of faith, the affirmation of faith that we have on, it's written on our church website, that links us to all Christians around the world for over 2,000 years.

[32 : 18] These are all the core beliefs that the church, the people of God, have always believed. 2 Peter 1.10, Peter writes, Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities, you will never fall.

stick to the path that he has laid out. 1 Corinthians 2.14, Paul writes, The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The reason why we come to meet together is we worship a true and living God. Amen? We all believe this. We all testify to this. We all affirm these things.

No one can be a true Christian without understanding who Jesus Christ is. Look at verse 4. Paul says, There is a firmness.

There is an anchor to your faith. There is actually a military term. It is a faith that does not yield. That when the storm comes, you are anchored in.

[33 : 49] When the wind comes against a tree, it stands because it is well-rooted. You see, that is why cults always attack Jesus by saying, He was human.

He lived. He was a good moral teacher, but He was not the Son of God. Right? You start studying their doctrines. They always divide at that point. There used to be this group called the Emergent Church, which was just a redressing of liberal Christianity that rose probably from the 1800s.

But what it taught was the Bible wasn't safe enough. It wasn't sufficient enough. We needed something more. It was the same lies the Colossian Church was dealing with 2,000 years ago.

The only thing they offered was false humility. See, Paul rejoices in good order and firmness in a truth that does not yield.

The church at Colossae had been people who were always trying to bind the Christian faith to their own religious attitudes, their own religious backgrounds.

[35 : 07] And then the fourth principle that God clearly wants us in, and I want you to really see this. This is really interesting is that God wants us walking in Christ. I know it's obvious, but what does that mean?

Let's take a look at verses, chapter 2, verses 6 and 7. He says, therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.

Conduct your life, carry your life. What does that mean? Notice verse 7. It says, rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

So I want us to pay attention to the four phrases in verse 7. Rooted in Christ, built up in Christ, established in Christ, and thankful to Christ.

And remember, walking. Walking is a simple term, Jewish understanding, of how you conduct your life. How, what is your authentic self?

[36 : 09] That's why we always say, you know, we pick up on this. I was just thinking about this idea earlier this morning. When someone's kind of living a life, we say they're kind of sneaky.

Right? Right? We just, someone really isn't genuinely what their face to the public is. And it's a play off that word to walk. To walk confidently in who you are.

Someone sneaks around. Right? They're living a life they might be married, but they're having an affair. Or they put out the semblance that they're really good and honest people, but they're cheating their boss or some other kind of things.

They're sneaking around. So the idea, though, is to walk is how you authentically carry out your life. So notice, it says, the Colossians received Christ.

They received Christ with the full knowledge. They know who Jesus is. They know his teaching and that he is the sovereign Lord. This is the salvation message. But the Christian life doesn't stop there.

[37 : 13] The Christian message doesn't stop at John 3.16. It goes beyond. As one well-known evangelist simply states, he says, No man can be said to be truly converted to Christ who has not bent his will to God.

He may give intellectual assent to the claims of Christ and may have had even a religious experience. However, he is not truly converted until he has surrendered his will to Christ as Lord, Savior, and Master.

Why do I say these things? Well, let's look at these four phrases. Notice the term rooted in Christ. If you guys knew your Greek, it's in the perfect tense, which means it is a action that happened in the past, but the results are ongoing.

You with me on that? It's an action that happened in the past, but because of the most simple one is Jesus died on the cross in the past and he still saves. Amen? That's the action is ongoing.

Jeremiah 17 8 says, He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.

[38 : 42] To be built up in Christ, present tense, indicates that we are not a finished product. Amen? We're not the best yet. The best is still to come as we continue to grow and remain rooted in Christ.

This is the process of becoming more and more like Christ. We are all at different places in our walks and this is so important to keep growing.

Acts 20 32, Luke writes, That friend that I asked about where they had seen the different view on the gospel, I asked them, well, what are you learning in church?

He said, well, at church we just do the gospel. We already became Christian, so we don't even bother with the Bible anymore. And what kind of sad church is that? They think because they say John through 16 that there was no maturity, no growth, and now you had a life that was desperately lost.

2 Peter 3, 18 says, But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory now and to the day of eternity.

[40 : 06] Amen. The third quality I want you to pay attention to, it says established, or another word is strength in Christ. Our faith is strengthened as we live it out.

It's like a muscle that continues to lift weights. 2 Thessalonians 2, 16 says, Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, it says, comfort your hearts and establish them or strengthen them in every good word and work and word.

You get that? As you live out this Christian faith in obedience, you become stronger. It's simple, it's not just knowledge, there's the action.

1 Peter 5:10 says, And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

That's a promise to put on your fridge. When you're going through hard times, the promise that Peter gives us is that Jesus Christ Himself will be the one to do those things for us.

[41 : 32] you see, what's interesting, and these three qualities I read for you, they're all in the passive voice.

If you forget your grammar like I often do, it implies to us that there has to be another action to help us with that action.

What that is, is we need divine action. to live this Christian life. And it comes through Jesus who is at work in us.

But I want you to note the last action, which is actually in the active voice, which is the work that we do in our journey of Christ.

Notice it says, thankfulness to Christ. God's action in our lives should evoke overwhelming thanksgiving.

[42 : 43] That's the only thing we're responsible for. Isn't that great? The strength to do those things comes from God himself. And now our response to this Christian life is to be thankful.

faithful. And I know this is hard, especially during hardship, pain of life, or tragedy. But the fact of the matter is the Christian knows and trusts that God is faithful.

And it is upon this truth that we cast our hope on. God. The reality is a thankless spirit betrays a life that is not focused on the greatness of God.

A thankless spirit betrays a selfish heart focused on one's own comfort, needs, and desires. But a thankful spirit focuses on the greatness of God.

That's why we have Christmas and sort of the way even the world kind of understands. That it's better to give than to receive, right? But our role is to do this 365.

[43 : 55] It's not just a special day to be thinking this way. It is to be our way of life. You see, God wants us to be strong-hearted.

God wants us to be united in love. God wants us to be settled in our understanding of Him so that we may walk in Christ.

You see, as we grow in our faith together, these qualities are dependent upon us being together. They're not meant for the lone believer living by himself.

The fact of the matter is they are impossible to be done on one's own. Thus why being a part of the church is the only way to grow and know the love of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Dear Holy Heavenly Father, I just I can think of we can only imagine how encouraging these words would have been to a defeated people that lived 2,000 years ago as they were kind of being lied to.

[45 : 06] People were coming in and trying to bring the world into their faith in Jesus and how Paul just straightened everything out. How joyful it would have been for them to know these truths, to be secured in these truths.

Father, it's the same thing for us. Father, I do not ever want to make light of someone's pain or difficulty in this world or that Jesus is just a truistic statement.

Just trust in Jesus. The only way we trust in Jesus is because you're working within us, because we have an understanding of who you are, that we are to find comfort in the words that you give us in your scripture.

I take solace in the words offered by Peter that you promise after this day is done that you will be there to restore me, to strengthen me, to encourage me.

It's not just a thought, but a promise that you grant all of us who are one in Christ Jesus. What a horrible place the world would have been without you.

[46 : 24] How dark. I know just even when God withdrew his hand, just even before the time of Noah, how wicked man had become.

Even though man was the image bearer of your love, your wisdom, your kindness, all the things that you are, we weren't.

And even as you set yourself up as king over your people, they still rebelled, they still sought after their own good.

Families betrayed families, families killed families. It was a wicked time, it was a dark time. And then on that Christmas day, you finally brought your truth, your mercy, and love, love, and ultimately the power by how we can live together as a church.

That that darkness no longer needs to exist. Even in the pain of despair, there is still hope, there is still truth, and there is still everlasting goodness.

[47 : 48] so Father, we thank you for these words that you gave the Apostle Paul to share with these beleaguered saints. We're thankful that these words of encouragement have endured, and I pray that we would find them in encouragement as well as we head into this holiday season.

We pray that our focus would indeed be on you, your words, not our ways, in the hearts of others and not our own. We thank you for the strength that you provide for us to live this life.

We would be lost without you, Jesus. In your name we pray. Amen.