

**American Baptist Churches of Maine
Christian Nurture Committee
Weekly Devotions – 2026
January – November**

Colossians

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

² To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters^[a] in Christ:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.^[b]

Thanksgiving and Prayer

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,^[c] who is a faithful minister of Christ on our^[d] behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,^[e] ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^[f] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Supremacy of the Son of God

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of^[g] your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to

present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Paul's Labor for the Church

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

²⁸ He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

January 5, 2026

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, Colossians 1:1

Paul's identity is not wrapped in academic achievements, in religious affiliation, nor in ancestry. Paul's identity is determined by God. If nothing else, Paul knows that he is an apostle by the will of God. Certainty in one's calling is the baseline for ministry. Why am I here? What am I doing? Who do I serve?

When uncertainty arises and adversity comes, who you are, your identity, will determine how you respond to the circumstances, situations, and context you find yourself in. The assurance of being certain that it is God's will that has placed you here provides stability and hope during prosperity, adversity, and change.

January 12, 2026

and Timothy our brother, Colossians 1:1

Timothy is identified as our brother. Paul could have called him, "my brother" but Timothy has become our brother not by Paul's will or action but as a gift from God. Timothy belongs to the whole family as do you and I in Christ. In the same way in which God is never my Father when in the gathered community, so we are our brother and sister every time we gather. What a difference it would make when talking to someone in the congregation as "our brother or our sister" rather than mine. It calls the congregation to see that person as a gift to the community and reminds the individual that they belong to us and we to them.

January 19, 2025

To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters^[a] in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. Colossians 1:2¹

Paul's audience is God's holy people in Colossae. How the faithful in Colossae saw themselves is not the point of the greeting. We all need to be reminded that we belong to God and therefore, are being made one with Him. God's characteristics are becoming ours. Chief among God's characteristics is faithfulness. Paul readily acknowledges the image of God among them. There is no other image of God that is allowed other than our brother and sister. If you want to see God, look at them. There you will find the image of God. Grace and peace are reflected in our brother and sister.

January 26, 2025

³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people. Colossians 1:3-4

Is there anything more precious to the ear than to know that you are being prayed for as a thanksgiving offering to God? When was the last time you felt offered up as a thanksgiving offering? When was the last time you offered up our brother or sister as a thanksgiving offering to God?

The basis of the thanks being offered to God lies in Paul and Timothy's hearing about the Colossians' faith and love for God's people. If you are known for anything, are you known for your faithfulness and love for God's people? How valued is that attribution?

February 2, 2026

— ⁵the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel ⁶that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. ⁷You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,^[a] who is a faithful minister of Christ on our^[a] behalf, ⁸and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. Colossians 1:5-8

The source of love and faithfulness is hope. Hope is treasured in places where it can never be taken from us. Christ is our hope. He loved us and gave himself for us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Every time we gather as a people of faith and love we do so centering in Christ, our hope. This is the good news we celebrate and

share. Paul calls it the true message of the Gospel. I confess that I don't celebrate and share good news enough. Good news is a contagion that should be shared early and often. Hope produces hope in ever increasing measure. Who caught hope from you?

February 9, 2026

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,^[e] ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^[f] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:9-14

What have people heard about you? What do they know about your faith? Are you somebody's reason for thanksgiving to God in prayer? What Paul has heard about the Church in Colosse certainly prompts Paul's prayer. There are dear churches that I serve that prompt me to give thanks to God for them. There is a sweetness associated with God's people that lingers long after the meeting is over.

In a church I pastored, the historic minutes of every meeting ended with the phrase, "they departed in love". Somewhere in the record, they stopped that practice. Maybe it stopped because the church was in strife? My hunch is that someone felt the phrase to be "old-fashioned" or simply "unimportant" and so it was dropped. How unfortunate.

February 16, 2025

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,^[e] ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^[f] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:9-14

I find myself praying Paul's prayer for the Colossians for myself. I want to know by intimate experience God's will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit provides so that I may live a life "worthy" of the Lord. Without an intimate knowledge of God's will, how am I supposed to know what "pleases Him in every way"? Will my efforts bear good fruit in every good work or will my labor be pointless and fruitless? A life wasted is not a life lived abundantly. If nothing else, knowing by experience God's will through His Spirit's provision is the key to abundant life.

February 23, 2026

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,^[e] ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^[f] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:9-14

Endurance in ministry is a necessary component. Pouring yourself out day after day will exhaust you. How do you revive after the daily grind? Paul recognizes the need to have a daily inpouring of the resurrection power of Christ, the secret to great endurance and patience. This is the inheritance of God's people, the power of God at work in us moving us from darkness into the kingdom of the Son He loves. This is the difference made by faith. A stark contrast between dark and light, so the contrast between what we were and what we are becoming. We have been brought into the kingdom life borne by the One who loves, forgives, and redeems.

March 1, 2026 St. David's Day

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:9-14

In Christ, all things were created through Him and for Him. He is the firstborn over all creation. The intimate connection between the created and the eternal is Christ. He is the bridge between what can be seen and that which is unseen. All things are held together in Him. It is hard to fathom the depth of Paul's insight into Christ. Such enormity is not often brought into my prayer life because I want to speak with Christ, person to person. How do you talk to the One who is before all things and in whom all things hold together? Are

words enough? Do words matter? They must because it was through the spoken word that creation came forth. Then, it must be enough for me to utter words, trusting that my Savior will hear. In prayer, I imitate the One who spoke me into existence.

March 8, 2026

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Colossians 1:15-19

Christ is the firstborn from among the dead. Creation, God's hovering, bringing into being life, is in the Head of the Body, the Church. Here is the beginning again, Christ Creator, Christ Re-Creator for the purpose of supremacy. There is none like Him. Christ, the fullness of God reconciling to Himself all things, transforming all things into His image and likeness made through peace, the shedding of His blood on the cross. The death of the old creation on the cross explodes in life through His resurrection.

O Christ, what are we that you are mindful of us?

March 15, 2026

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of ^{21a} your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. Colossians 1:21-23

Whenever I think that I can tell God how to run the world, I find that we are at odds. Whenever I demand God to do what I want and how I want it, God laughs and I become angry. God, at times, just doesn't understand what I need or want. He doesn't "get me".

Alienation and estrangement happens in relationships. Appeasement is never the answer; reconciliation is. Reconciliation is relational. It brings two divergent groups together to find a way to be or remain in relationship. Reconciliation is where both sides are willing to give, to submit, to that which restores the relationship. Reconciliation acknowledges that the relationship is of greater value than self.

Paul reminds us that God values relationship and gave His Son to restore our relationship. Paul reminds us that reconciliation is always a two-way street. Therefore, I must give if I want to be reconciled to God. To hold on to, to cling to the hope held out in the Gospel calls us to give ourselves in service to God. Reconciliation is part of the divine design

which orders our relationship with each other. What are you willing to give to remain in relationship?

March 22, 2026

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:24-27

Reconciliation is the on-going work of the body. Finding ways to deepen relationships while continually adding divergent people is filling up in our own fellowship, our own selves that which is lacking regarding Christ's affliction. "To err is human, to forgive is divine". This is the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now disclosed – God's design to reconcile the world to Himself is worked out in the gathered community of faith. This is the great mission of the church – to bring together in Christ every nation, language group and people. This is our work, our suffering, our calling, our joy; Christ in you, the hope of glory.

March 29, 2026

²⁸ He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. Colossians 1:28-29

Christ is proclaimed. He is Lord. We teach, correct, and counsel the gathered community with wisdom – God is a God of reconciliation. We disciple others so that they grow up and take on the responsibility of reconciliation. Anyone who has raised children will wonder, "when are they going to grow up?" or stand amazed at their maturity which is beyond the years, sometimes all in the same day. This is the calling of ministry – to strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me to bring others to maturity in Christ, to be a people known for reconciliation. This has been a distinctive of American Baptist life and thought. We work at reconciliation because God is at work in us.

Colossians 2

April 6, 2026

I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ² My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding,

in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. Colossians 2:1-5

The hard work of ministry is contention. Contention is not with people; it is for people. The goal of contending is to bring together people in Christ who are encouraged and united by the love of God in Christ so that together they may know personally and experientially Christ and be shaped by His character and image. Motives are always questioned. Why are you doing this? What is the purpose of this? Unless the answer to questions of why is, so that you may know Christ personally and experientially, our motives are misguided. Ministry must always be about bringing people together in Christ alone.

Some have tried to bring unity through creed, some through doctrine, some through dogma, each does bring a certain amount of unity, but it is always manufactured rather than organic. Christ alone was, is, and will be the only One that brings unity and is worthy of contending for. All other things will pass, but He shall reign forever and ever. Amen.

April 13, 2026

I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ²My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. Colossians 2:1-5

A disciplined faith is a faith that clings to Christ alone. I wish I was more disciplined. It is easy to follow the latest trends, to be caught up in the new, to be engaged by human insight and critique. In our information age, we are bombarded by trends, arguments, insights, and opinions. It is and can be maddening. So much noise, so little quiet.

The Spirit does work quietly. The Spirit's work is a hidden work, revealed in time. It is both corporate and individualistic. It always endears Christ and provides wisdom to those who ask. Self-reflection and discernment is a needed and necessary aspect of ministry, of contending. Ministry is engaging with the Spirit so that transformation in Christ is the result. How attuned am I to the prompting of the Spirit? Is my world view shaped more by social media, news stations, blogs, etc. or by the quiet promptings of the Spirit? Am I disciplined?

April 20, 2026

⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and

overflowing with thankfulness.⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces^[a] of this world rather than on Christ.⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh^[b] was put off when you were circumcised by^[c] Christ,¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you^[d] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2: 6-15

I received Christ as a gift from God. I received Christ as Lord, the One who is over all, in all, and through all. I received Him by faith. I received Him because He received me. There are no barriers, nothing to hide. He has found me out and still received me. This is the essence of His love for us. He took us when we had nothing to offer Him.

The old Welsh hymn, Bryn Calfaria, comes to mind: "Take me as I am Oh Savior, better I can never be. Thou alone canst bring me nearer, Self but draws me far from Thee. I can never, I can never, I can never but within Thy wounds be healed, but within Thy wounds be healed." Here is where I need to remain rooted for here, I am strengthened, renewed and made whole.

April 27, 2026

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh^[b] was put off when you were circumcised by^[c] Christ,¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you^[d] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2: 9-15

In Easter's glow, we live. The triumph of the cross is the end of the old creation. The cross put to death Death itself with all its trappings in order that we might have life and have it abundantly. Christ recreated the world. Out of the old creation, the new creation springs. I can only understand so much about His crucifixion and resurrection. There are depths where I cannot go. But I am certain of this, Christ has raised me, and the power of God is at work in my life. I know this because I want to know Christ and what He accomplished in His death and resurrection. I know that if I wasn't raised with Him, I wouldn't care about what He did or did not do.

“My sin, Oh the Bliss, of this glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole. Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, praise the Lord, Oh my soul.”

May 4, 2026

¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸ Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. ¹⁹ They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. ²⁰ Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: ²¹ “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? ²² These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. ²³ Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Colossians 2:16–23

Living in the shadows. Seeing things but never clearly. The constructs of the human mind are amazing and terrifying. Sometimes, they are both at the same time. Shadows do that. They draw you in and then scare you. How many philosophies, and schools of thought are there? Each is a shadow of reality, half-truths whispered in darkened places caught by willing ears that want to be drawn into what is offered. Zombies, the living dead, are frightful creatures of our own making. They exist but never live. In the power of the resurrection, there is no half-life. We are raised in Christ, set free from half-truths, shadows and whatever schemes would impose their will on us.

In Christ, we belong to a new age that is even now breaking into and tearing apart the old. You can't impose, scare, or force your will on another. A Baptist distinctive is soul liberty. Baptists have long understood the reality that the conscience is free and only God can, by the power of the resurrection, renew and transform it. “*Let God be true and everyone else a liar*” (Romans 3:4).

“My life I give henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.”

Colossians 3

May 11, 2026

³ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your^[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.^[b] ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of

all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Colossians 3:1-11

Where you sit changes your view and your responsibilities. How does it feel to sit in your seat? Seated in and with Christ at the right hand of the Father is more than a vantage point. It is a seat of governance. Governance must have a primary overarching value or set of values that provide both aspirations and accountabilities.

Paul calls the gathered community to live out what it means to be in Christ. This is how we see and govern the world. The gathered community has the responsibility to bring God's kingdom and will on earth as it is in heaven. Paul calls the gathered community to put to death that which belongs to our human nature: division, hostility, and death. In Christ, God is recreating humanity after the image and likeness of Christ.

In the Kingdom, there is a putting off the old and putting on the new which is marked by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Love is the essential value of the new which is demonstrated in the willingness of the gathered community to forgive one another as God in Christ forgives you.

An essential distinctive of being Baptist is the responsibility that each member of the gathered community voluntarily assumes by covenant to "work out what it means to love one another as Christ loved us." At the heart of every gathered community is the responsibility of living out the reality that we are seated in the heavenly realms. Let us strive to behave so. Anything less is not worthy of the Christ we proclaim.

"May the Mind of Christ, my Savior, live in me from day to day by His power and love controlling all I do and say."

May 18, 2026

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:12-14

What are you known for? Self-reflection is hard work. Hearts deceive so easily. What we may aspire to may simply be a "hope or wish" rather than a work in progress. Soul change is hard work. Asking, "Am I", questions require truth and integrity. It also requires a willingness to change, to grow, and to mature. God places difficult things, circumstances, and situations in our lives so that we may wrestle with ourselves and with His character and nature. This is the way of love. Love is always sacrificial.

Once insight is gained, change follows, people notice and God smiles. *"My life I give henceforth to live, O Christ for thee alone."*

May 25, 2026

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:15-17

Peace, the process of taking that which is broken and making it whole again, is at the center of Christ's rule in our lives. Like Christ, we bind up, renew, heal and restore. It begins in our own life and then pours out and into the lives of others. Being thankful isn't an option it is part of Christ's rule.

I have found that poetry, words rightly and fitly spoken, produce amazing results in our quest for peace when put to rhyme and meter. As I write, songs accompany my thoughts and bolster Paul's revelation. I, at times, need to be careful because I can't often tell if the tune in my head isn't leaking out of my mouth. Yes, you do get strange looks in the grocery store when this happens but, every now and then, you get the privilege of forming a duet with a stranger.

*Now that I'm Yours and You are mine
Our love is the secret that I find
I'll spend forever in the pleasure
I found looking in Your eyes
Give me Jesus
Give me Jesus
You can have all this world
You can have all this world*

June 1, 2026

*¹⁸ Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, ^[a] do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. ²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism. **4** Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven. Colossians 3:18- 4:1*

How do you redeem the social structures of the world in which you live? Paul's answer is simple and shocking. You don't overthrow structures and institutions, you disembowel them. The structures and institutions only have power over if you assume that they have authority. In Christ, all authority over all things is His. The gathered community lives in that reality and lives out that reality with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. It sees the world differently and refuses to play by its rules. In essence, it shakes the world to its core.

*"Onward, then, ye people, joine our happy throng,
Blend with ours your voices in the triumph song;
Glory, laud, and honor, unto Christ, the King;
This through countless ages men and angels sing."*

Colosians 4

June 8, 2026

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ And 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. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:2-6

Christian faith is a life lived in relationship with God. To "call upon the name of God" is a marvelous gift. Naming is at the heart of any relationship. Names are given not to control but to coalesce. God reveals His name, the I Am, to Moses. Jesus reveals God as Father. We are given a name by God precious to Him and to us.

Prayer is the deepening of our relationship which God desires and affirms. How sweetly does the name of Jesus fall on our ear. There is something about the name.

*"Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him;
I will ¹⁵set him on high, because he has known My name.
¹⁵ He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will deliver him and honor him.
¹⁶ With ¹⁶long life I will satisfy him,
And show him My salvation." Psalm 91:14-16*

June 15, 2026

⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossian 4:5-6

What could possibly be added?

*“Teach me, Lord, teach me truly how to live,
that I may come to know thee,
and in thy presence serve thee with gladness,
and sing songs of praise to thy glory.”*

June 22, 2026

⁷ Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant^(u) in the Lord. ⁸ I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our^(u) circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹ He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. ¹⁰ My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) ¹¹ Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews^(u) among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. Colossians 4:7-15

Relationships are at the heart of ministry. The old adage is true, “Ministry would be a whole lot easier without people but then again, it wouldn’t be ministry.” The care of souls is a most difficult and rewarding work. It begins with a desire to be in community with others. Are you willing to serve others? Will you pay the costs of serving others? Will you put their needs ahead of your own? What will you sacrifice for them? These are not questions for a pastor. These are questions for you.

It is amazing to me how strangers that we encounter in ministry become “more than friends” in service. Their faithfulness becomes your inspiration. You’re never to forget that you have been used by God for their training, but the Holy Spirit is the “Teacher”. Wisdom recognizes when to step out of the teaching role and step back as they lead, basking in their care as a gift from God.

*“Spirit of the Living God, Fall afresh on me,
Spirit of the Living God, Fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me.
Spirit of the Living God, Fall afresh on me.”*

June 29, 2026

¹⁶ After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.¹⁷ Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord."¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Colossians 4:16 -18

Some folks share trials for their own benefit. I'm not sure why. Perhaps it stokes their ego, it may be that misery loves company. It could be that old habits die hard.

Paul shares his "troubles" to inspire others. We all have crosses to bear. He doesn't make light of that fact. He embraces it. Because we all have needs, we all need encouragement. If the circumstances of life inspire others to be faithful, then what is shared is meant to motivate faithfulness not engender pity. Let this question linger behind the scene and before you share, ask "Why am I sharing this detail of my life with you?"

"O Soul are you wearied and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!"

Philippians

July 5, 2026

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:1-2

Actions often lead to unintended consequences. People may question motives, assuming there is an unspoken agenda behind what was done. While that may be true at times, most people initially take actions at face value. Suspicion usually develops only after a pattern has been established.

Paul's letter to the Philippians could easily have raised suspicion among loyal Romans. After all, respectable citizens did not end up in prison. Paul understands this challenge and, throughout the letter, indirectly addresses such criticism while showing the cost of following Christ in a world that does not recognize His authority or legitimacy.

From the beginning, Paul writes to "God's holy people in Christ Jesus." Believers are set apart from the kingdoms of this world because they belong to Christ. Even if they are citizens of Philippi, those who are in Christ are citizens of another Kingdom, where Jesus is Lord over all. This is the essential difference: two kingdoms compete for loyalty, each

shaped by different values. Wherever two value systems exist, one will ultimately govern the other. Being set apart in Christ Jesus takes precedence over every earthly kingdom and value system.

How do others view your actions? Is there a pattern that needs to change?

July 12, 2026

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Philippians 1:1-2

A recent trend among Baptist churches is the “rediscovery” of eldership. Yet the term elder can mean different things. It may refer to a governing board, a hand-selected group that supports the pastor and his agenda, a body that rules apart from the congregation, or a delegated group accountable to the congregation.

Early Baptists were familiar with Presbyterian church government, in which a select group served as “elders.” Rather than adopting that model, Baptists understood the pastor as the one responsible for bringing a seasoned word before the congregation, while the congregation discerned God’s leading and its missional response.

Many early Baptists interpreted references to elders in passages like this as referring to pastors from several small congregations, often meeting in homes. Deacons were understood as delegated servants charged with caring for the congregation’s needs. It is easy to read an American context into Paul’s words.

Many Baptist churches later developed pastor-deacon models of governance. Scripture does not prescribe a single governance structure for the local church. Christ is Lord, and He alone directs His Church. In our tradition, matters of faith and practice remain in the hands of the local congregation, accountable to Christ and joined in fellowship with others who are in Him.

Am I willing to be accountable to those with whom I freely gather in Christ? Do I recognize the fellowship I share with others who are in Him? What are the blessings and responsibilities of being in fellowship with other believers?

July 19, 2026

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

*To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Philippians 1:1-2*

Grace and peace are the way we greet one another in Christ. God's gracious provision in Christ has brought a profound change in my life. Grace is the undeserved and unearned gift of God's love, given to us while we were still "sinners." No one deserves grace. Life is not fair; grace is given. Fairness would require an entirely different response. Am I able to greet others with grace? Am I willing to go beyond what fairness requires?

Peace is evidence of God's transforming, resurrection power, which brings health, wholeness, and healing. As broken vessels in Christ Jesus, we are being made whole. This is a process of transformation. Am I willing to see people as a work in progress rather than a finished product? Do I recognize the places in my own life that still need peace? Am I able to see others through peace?

July 26, 2026

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

*It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.
Philippians 1:3-8*

Do I give thanks when I remember you? Over time, I have learned to appreciate both those who support my ministry and those who question or disagree with me. Some who seemed confrontational in the moment have become dear to me because of their honesty. Praying for and through such people has often given me deeper insight into their character and motives.

The work of an Executive Minister can often be marked by encounters with "those kinds of people"—people who may not fully understand the challenges and burdens that come with caring for and nurturing others. Yet there is a partnership in the gospel that the contemporary church does not always celebrate: the difficult, burdensome partnership that still belongs to Christ's work among us.

I have come to trust that the God who continues to transform my life is also at work in others. In Christ, God's promises are always yes and amen, so why would I doubt His work in them? We are all still being formed, and what seems overwhelming today may

soften with time. So, we give thanks in every season. God is at work, accomplishing His will in and through us. What an amazing partnership in the gospel.

August 2, 2026

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:9–11

Love stands at the center of Paul's prayer for the Philippians. It is a distinct way of living, thinking, judging, and responding to the world. Rooted in Christ Jesus, love follows His standards, bears fruit through Him which leads to the glory and praise of God. Love always points back to its source.

What is astonishing is that God chooses to reveal His love through us. Paul urges his readers to see his imprisonment differently, through the lens of love. Such love reshapes how we think, challenges ordinary human assumptions, and brings a depth of knowledge and insight that human wisdom cannot reach. I still have much to learn about love.

Do I approach the problems and difficulties before me with the knowledge and insight that love provides?

August 9, 2026

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard^[a] and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. Philippians 1:12–14

Paul wants the Philippians to understand, from lived experience, that circumstances are not always what they appear to be. It is hard to see how imprisonment could advance the gospel. Why would God take Paul out of the starting lineup and leave him on the bench for so much of the game? Decisions like that get coaches fired.

Yet Paul is not out of the "game." He is exactly where God wants him to be, and he can recognize God's purpose even in imprisonment. He is aware that the whole palace guard has come to understand that he is in chains because of Christ.

In difficult situations, I wish I could see beyond the immediate circumstances to God's larger purpose. Love provides the reasoning that helps make that possible. Paul understands that his imprisonment has strengthened the brothers and sisters, giving them confidence in the Lord and courage to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Who is watching you walk through difficult times, and what are they learning from your actions? What are you learning as you go through difficult situations?

August 16, 2026

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Philippians 1:15-18

How do I preach Christ? At first glance, we may assume our motives are pure. We would like to believe we never preach Christ out of envy or rivalry, but always from goodwill and sincere devotion.

How do I keep ambition in check? Am I concerned with whether others think I am good, solid, inspiring, or better than someone else? Will I be invited back? Sincerity can be hard to sustain. There are always opportunities to “stir things up,” but doing so can undermine the gospel. How can the Good News be truly good if it is treated as good news only for some and not for all?

Once again, love provides the needed perspective. Whether motives are false or true, Christ is still proclaimed. In the preaching of the gospel, God is at work, able to use our best and our weakest efforts for His glory and praise.

Is God using me because of my faithfulness, or in spite of my motives?

August 23, 2026

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me. Philippians 1:19-26

“Where seldom is heard an encouraging word...” this twist can sound especially true in ministry. For many pastors, the local church can feel lonely and isolating, and ministry itself can carry a similar weight. Yet it is a gift to know that others are praying. Paul

understood the blessing of being cared for by God's people and sustained by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

May you personally experience the care of those you serve and the sustaining provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

August 30, 2026

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me. Philippians 1:19-26

Few of us face death as an immediate possibility, and most of us do not live with that awareness each day. We rarely think about our own mortality, and perhaps that is merciful. To dwell on death constantly would overwhelm us.

Paul's circumstances forced him to confront the possibility of death. As he faced his mortality, he saw two outcomes: death, which would bring him fully to Christ, or continued life, which would mean fruitful labor in ministry. Though Paul speaks as if he has a choice, he does not. Like the rest of us, he lives by grace until grace is brought to victory in death. What stands out is Paul's confidence that this encounter with the authorities will not be his end. Instead, it will become an opportunity for renewed ministry, serving the progress and joy of his readers' faith. It will give Christ another opportunity to work through Paul so that those he serves may boast in Christ.

Hard times can strengthen resolve. May God strengthen your resolve in the difficulty you face, so that we may rejoice with you to the glory of God in Christ.

September 6, 2026

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. Philippians 1:27-30

Circumstances can tempt us to react, but faith calls us to respond with purpose. Because Jesus has overcome the world, we are called to live in a manner worthy of the Gospel. Paul describes this life as “standing firm”—a lifelong pursuit of knowing Christ, His love, and His grace. Love casts out fear, and standing firm in the Spirit reflects the salvation God has given us. Fearful retreat has no place in the Christian life or message.

Where are you becoming more proactive in your life because of faith?

September 13, 2026

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.
Philippians 1:27-30

Paul teaches that faith in Christ includes the privilege of suffering for Him, a truth often overlooked in the Gospel’s message. Suffering for Christ may not resonate with much of the contemporary church, yet it remains inseparable from faithful discipleship. To follow Christ is to take up the cross, practicing daily self-denial as a form of dying to self for His sake.

What are you willing to lay aside to follow Christ?

September 20, 2026

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. *Philippians 2:1-4*

Faith takes a proactive posture, giving life a purpose that stands against selfish ambition and vain conceit. Vain conceit is an inflated sense of self-importance that is empty, superficial, and spiritually unhealthy. Paul calls the Philippians to reject such motives because they bless no one and lift no one toward what is higher. Humility, instead, teaches us to value others by placing their interests before our own. How marvelous that the greatest example of humility is Jesus Christ, the God we serve, who put others before Himself. He is worthy of our worship.

September 27, 2026

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

What shapes our relationships? What mindset makes them healthy, and how do we model that health for others? What is guiding the relationships we are building?

This ancient hymn is so rich that it resists explanation. It is astonishing that the God of creation did not use His infinite power and authority for His own advantage, but emptied Himself, humbled Himself, and gave His life. What wondrous love is this? Do I understand the call to become nothing as I follow our Savior? Love requires setting aside the self for the sake of another, regardless of the cost. Do others see that love in me? Have I experienced that love in you?

Philippians

October 4, 2026 Philippians 2:12-13

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Obedience begins with listening, which is more than simply hearing. My grandson Samuel often hears his mother say, “Sam, give me your ears!” Before she speaks, he must give her his attention. Selective hearing is a reality for all of us.

Careful listening is a gift of time, attention, and action. It lies at the heart of every relationship and begins with a choice: to set aside my own agenda long enough to consider another’s. For whom will you pause your agenda? Who pauses theirs for you?

Obedience begins with listening and is completed with follow-through. What we hear must be acted upon, and doing so is always a conscious choice. What will I do with what I have heard? Will I do what is being asked of me, or will I refuse? Trust is part of obedience: is this request for my good, for the good of others, or neither?

Blind obedience has no place in a life of faith. The conscious is free. The conscious willfully determines to actively listen and to make a decisive response. Good decisions require active engagement.

The Apostle Paul appeals to his relational trust with his dear friends, the church at Philippi, as he urges them to listen and follow his counsel: to work out their salvation with fear and trembling because God is at work within them.

The salvation we receive calls for obedience. Active listening and determined decision-making that leads to action, follow through on what has been heard. For those in Christ, that follow-through is to fulfill Christ's good purpose in our lives. What decisions are you making today because of your salvation? What good purpose are you fulfilling?

October 11, 2026 Philippians 2:14-18

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ^{so} that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

The older I get, the harder it seems to "do everything without grumbling or arguing." Whether there is truly more to complain about—or simply more I can rationalize—such a posture resists grace. I do not think the Apostle Paul forbids every complaint or disagreement. Rather, he warns against making grumbling and rationalizing the default pattern of life. It takes little wisdom or ambition to identify problems. When my inner struggles try to reshape the world in my own image, they distort and disfigure the image of God—His divine design for me.

By contrast, a focused confidence in Christ's Lordship over His church and the world brings hope, insight, gratitude, patience, and many other graces into and through my life. The "shekinah"—the glory-presence of God—is made visible when His grace is displayed in me.

Paul hoped his work among the Philippians would bear lasting fruit. Every member of the church shares that hope: that their labor was not in vain, and that God's grace was evident in their life and ministry—for His glory and for the good of others.

What is your hope? What are you striving to accomplish? What reward—the true payday of your life—do you envision?

October 18, 2026 Philippians 2:19–24

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

“Make new friends, but keep the old; one is silver and the other gold.” This familiar little rhyme still rings true. I enjoy hearing from old friends—catching up, continuing the story, and filling in the gaps that time has left. In Christ, our lives are woven together.

News about others reaches us in many ways. Communication has never been easier, yet studies suggest people may be lonelier than ever.

Perhaps we also have more excuses for failing to keep in touch. Whatever the reason, loneliness remains a common reality. Curiosity is a gift from God—a deep desire to learn and know more. Divine curiosity seeks to see what Christ is doing in another person’s life. It helps fill in the gaps, reveals Christ’s work in others, and strengthens our hope that He is also at work in us. Often God’s work is quiet and hidden; curiosity draws it into view.

My hope is that you will remain curious about what Christ is doing. So, when was the last time you called someone simply to find out what Christ has been doing in their life? Make the call.

October 25, 2026 Philippians 2:25–30

But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

Because our lives are intertwined, people matter. How often has the sight of a friend lifted your spirit? Even a simple text from a friend can bring a smile—emojis aside. Friendship is good for the soul, and it blesses both giver and receiver.

The Apostle Paul was blessed by a friend who cared for his needs. While Paul was imprisoned, Epaphroditus served him faithfully. The church at Philippi extended its friendship by sending Epaphroditus to Paul—friends caring for friends.

Paul knew that Epaphroditus's illness had troubled the Philippian church. They cared for him just as they cared for Paul. Sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi was both necessary and loving. Paul understood that they needed him more than he did.

Genuine relationships are attentive to another's needs. Jesus, our truest friend, knows our needs, joys, sorrows, hopes, and dreams. He sends, and He receives. We reflect His friendship when we act for another's good. Who is your friend? Who is attentive to you? Whose friend are you?

November 1, 2026 Philippians 3:1

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

What grabs your attention? What do you hold onto in desperate seasons of life? What gives hope in hard circumstances, fiery trials, overwhelming odds? What gets you through the "ick" of life?

How often we need to remind ourselves and one another that Christ is our anchor in the storm. He is the One we cling to when life rages around us. Circumstances may not change, trials may not grow easier, and the odds may still seem against us, but Christ remains constant. His promise is true: He never leaves us or abandons us.

There is a deep satisfaction in knowing Christ. Even greater, knowing that "nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ". While I don't enjoy bad odds, fiery trials, and difficult seasons in life, I have grown to understand that these things are needed and necessary to the deepening of my soul, to the transformation of my character.

We are called to give thanks in all things. I'm thankful for the friend that reminds me in times of trouble that Christ is faithful and the storm will pass.

November 8, 2026 Philippians 3:2-11

Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my

Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in^[a] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

What gives you hope? If it is not Christ, then what is it? Everything visible is temporary; all that we see will one day pass away. We can build many dreams on things that are easily swept away and quickly lost.

Even good things can become obstacles to hope when we hold them too tightly or give them greater worth than they deserve. True value is found not in possessions, but in Christ alone. Yet what is unseen can be difficult to hold onto, because it lies beyond our senses. Much of what we know—and much of what guides us—comes through what we can see, hear, and touch.

Paul reminds us that faith in Christ connects us to what is truly valuable. Through faith, knowing Christ opens a world beyond the senses and transforms our experience into a knowledge that exceeds human understanding. In Christ, the intangible becomes tangible. This is the miracle of faith—the reality in which we live and move and have our being. Paul longs to be immersed in every dimension of knowing Christ.

Am I aware of the two realities in which I live? Do I recognize that ultimate reality lies beyond my senses? Have I surrendered myself to the new reality faith brings? Which reality do I trust to guide me throughout my life's journey?

November 15, 2026 Philippians 3:12-14

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Higher Ground

I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day;
Still praying as I onward bound,
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

Refrain

Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith on Heaven's table land;

A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Tho' some may dwell where these abound,
My prayer, my aim is higher ground.

I want to live above the world,
Though Satan's darts are me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The sound of saints on higher ground.

I want to scale the utmost height,
And catch a gleam of glory brenth;
But still I'll pray till Heave I've found.
Lord, lead me on to higher ground.

Johson Oatman Jr.

November 22, 2026 *Philippians 3:15-16*

All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Paul's experience shapes his perspective. Yet he does not see his life in Christ as unique to him. Every member of Christ's body can grow continually in grace. Those who are mature in faith bear witness to the reality of knowing Christ.

Spiritual maturity rests in the experience and knowledge of grace that come through union with Christ. God reveals Himself to all who seek Him, and the Holy Spirit remains the ultimate teacher. What puzzles me is why many who profess Christ seem to know about Him without truly knowing Him. Maturity means living in light of what has already been received—the transforming power of the resurrection that is at work in all who believe.

How long will we debate words while neglecting God's transforming power? How long will we study books while forgetting that life is found in Christ? How long will we seek teachers who know only in part while overlooking the Holy Spirit, the Teacher of all truth?

November 29th, 2026 *Philippians 3:17-21*

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their

mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

I am not sure I can speak as boldly as the Apostle Paul and say, “Follow my example.” I am not sure my life is that exemplary. Still, there are people among us whose lives are worth noticing. Their grace is evident, their example should be seen, and their sacrificial service is worth imitating.

Cruciform living is sacrificial living for Christ, to God’s glory and for the good of others. It appears in many forms, but it always leaves a trace of the divine. To live as Paul lived is to walk the way of the cross. What does serving Christ cost me?

Paul is clear: some claim to know Christ, yet their lives are anything but cruciform. His words are severe— “their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame” —but true. Their ministry serves themselves; their desires and efforts center on their own gain. True ministry is a life of self-denying service: “It is not I who live,” Paul says, “but Christ who lives in me.”

In cruciform living, transformation begins. We exchange earthly priorities for heavenly ones. As we await the day when all things are brought under Christ’s control, we willingly submit ourselves to Him, allowing His transforming power to shape our actions, thoughts, and words. Am I making that exchange intentionally? Does cruciform living shape my thoughts? Is sacrificial service my commitment—or a way to gain comfort, approval, or advantage?

December 6, 2026 Philippians 4:1-3

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Sacrificial service is the mark of Christian fellowship. Every member of the body is equal, and each shares responsibility to care for, strengthen, and sustain the church’s ministry and mission. Christ gives each person unique gifts, yet those gifts are meant for the good of the whole body. This is what it means to stand firm: to be committed to the health and flourishing of the whole under the Lordship of Christ.

The conflict between Euodia and Syntyche grieves Paul because their disunity has become more visible than their unity. His appeal for them to be of one mind points beyond their

differences to the greater reality they both share: Christ and Him crucified. This must remain the center of their life together. Everything else fades beside the surpassing gift of being in Christ.

Paul does not take sides; he stays centered in Christ. Both women are believers, both are committed to Jesus, and both sisters need the body's help to restore Christ as the priority in their relationship.

Who has helped you keep the main thing the main thing? How often have you allowed something minor to affect your relationship with God or with a brother or sister in Christ?