

Psalm 1 (New Revised Standard Version)

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Colossians 1:28-29, 2:5-14, 20a (New Revised Standard Version)

It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ. As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?

A troubled freshman went to the college chaplain with a problem.

He was being ridiculed and harassed by students in his dorm  
because of his Christian faith and his moral standards,  
specifically, that he didn't sleep around or get drunk.

After a little more conversation with him, the chaplain said,

"You know, it's amazing. You're really not a religious fanatic,  
not a Jesus-freak, or even a super-committed Christian,  
but rather, you strike me as being rather ordinary...

... and yet, just one person running around who can say, "no",  
that refusal to go along is **such a threat to everyone else**  
that they have to ridicule and try to shut you down."

The chaplain continued,

"My guess is that all this ridicule and harassment  
is going to strengthen your faith to grow a bit deeper,  
forcing you to work out the purpose God intends for you."

That is a critical and reassuring message for us to hear and trust  
because **it's not easy to live as a faithful Christian in this world.**

**Not** really, not if you truly let God's Word and way guide you.

**Not** if you allow Jesus to influence every aspect of your life.

**Not** if you let God's grace guide in all that you say and do.

It's way more than just wearing a cultural Christian façade.

So how do we faithfully live out into the world as Jesus has sent us,  
and yet not fall prey to the corrosive enticements,  
to the pervasive influences of the world around us?

For the most part, and for most of us,  
the real challenge and danger to our faith, and to our faithfulness,  
doesn't come as open hostility, threat or even ridicule.  
But it's far more subtle, as we may compromise and absorb  
from the ordinary influences and corruptions of our culture,  
that can distract, diminish and derail our spiritual life...  
**... often times in our earnest desire to fit in and appear successful.**

We are always in danger of **becoming tangled & caught up in the world,**  
and thereby compromising or losing **our Christian distinctiveness,**  
**and that's probably more of a problem for us than we realize.**

It's deciding between two fundamentally different ways & life-goals,  
choosing to follow God's guiding presence in our lives,  
or choosing to follow worldly influences and values.

Some try to resolve this by absolutely rejecting the world & culture,  
and isolating themselves from any outside corruption & temptation,  
such as the Amish, monks isolated in monasteries, and others.

But the problem is, evil isn't just out there in the world around us,  
no, **the real battles are those within,** our own wants and desires,  
selfish & subtle motivations that lead us away from God's call.

We're not taken out from this world or removed from its temptations.  
We are here to engage and converse with the world,  
to reflect God's love & purpose out into the world,  
to serve in God's name, **empowered by God's presence among us,**  
and invite the world God loves into a relationship with God –  
--- **for that is our calling and our purpose.**

**But it's not easy to live out fully the faith we claim to believe.**

When I was in high school, one of the coaches taught our health class,  
and coach Weaver also happened to be a very heavy smoker.

When we got to the unit on cigarette smoking and health concerns,  
I remember clearly how he kept telling us that soon, very soon,  
he would easily quit smoking, as soon as it was the right time.  
I also know that within a few years, he had died from lung cancer.

Soon – very soon – but that right time to quit never came.

He never could apply all that he knew about health and cigarettes,  
nor the many methods that he knew to quit smoking, to his own life.  
**He couldn't integrate what he knew was true, to how he lived.**

The Apostle Paul was writing back to the Christians in Colossae,  
concerned that as fairly recent converts to Christianity,  
they were vulnerable to their environment and other teachings,

so he's urging them to live out the contradistinctions of faith  
against the corruption, the ways and values of their world. vs. 6-7

*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and  
built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

So now that you have received Jesus as your Lord and Savior,

the emphasis is let your life match Jesus, stride for stride.

The idea is like when I used to take my granddaughters to the beach,  
and as a game, they would walk behind placing their tiny feet  
on top of the footprints that I'd left imprinted in the sand...  
... so too, we follow WALKING in the footsteps of Jesus.

**Our challenge is that since we are Christians,  
how do we keep our walk and faith fresh, alive and growing,  
despite corrupting environmental influences of our world?**

1<sup>st</sup> Paul answers, **by continuing to be deeply rooted in the Lord.**

The function of a root is for the nourishment of the plant,  
through which it draws its nutrients to grow and to live.

In the same way, we are to remain rooted in Christ,  
drawing our spiritual nourishment from the Lord.

2<sup>nd</sup> **built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught**

Don't exchange the eternal truths and promises of God,  
for finite and limited human knowledge & experience.

Don't be fooled by this world's ways, values and wisdom,  
toward shifting our focus away from our Lord, Jesus Christ.

**And how do we tell if that prescription is working?**

3<sup>rd</sup> The best indicator that we are walking faithfully with Christ,  
is our abounding in thanksgiving, our overflowing gratitude to God.

If we are not feeling thankful to God, that would suggest  
that we are focused on the **passing concerns** of this world,  
more than the **eternal blessings and promises** of God.

And as we read in Psalm 1, vs. 1-3

Blessed are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit  
in the seat of scoffers; but **their delight** is in the word of the LORD, and on his word they meditate day and  
night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do  
not wither.

The Psalmist is warning against absorbing the values of this world,  
which is to buy into advice of the wicked, and path sinners & scoffers tread

'the Law of the Lord' is more than just commandments & religious rules,  
but it's a life that seeks to know and obey God's will and ways  
that is lived within healthy and meaningful relationships.

'meditating day and night' is about  
having an unbroken relationship of a continuous walk with God,  
which is to have an authentic and on-going relationship with God,  
that's receptive to the Spirit's presence, comfort & guidance.

That means, we need to examine the events and the choices of our life  
1 by holding them up to the scrutiny of God through our prayer,  
2 by allowing God's Word to speak concerning our words and deeds,  
3 and also significant listening to other Christians in fellowship  
placed in our lives by God to help nurture and strengthen our faith...

... which the psalmist compares to a tree planted by a stream of water,  
by an ever-flowing source of fresh nourishment and nurture. vs. 3

like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.

From the meditation in preparation today, as Jeremiah writes, 17:7-8

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

It's about choosing to receive God's guidance into our lives,  
a life-sustaining and healthy **deep-rootedness in Christ**  
that is able to withstand draught, hard times and adversity.

Our call is to choose with care and deliberation,  
where and how we plant our roots to feed our minds and souls,  
for that will determine how we grow as the people of God...  
**... so that we can go out into the world in obedience to Christ,  
by living out the abundant life Jesus calls us to receive.**

Our call is to reach out into our community, and out to the world  
by serving to reflect God's own gracious invitation to strangers,  
while being well-aware of the seductive influences of our world,  
and that is can be a hostile, difficult and dangerous place.

To that end, the Apostle warns (from *The Message*), vs. 8

Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything. They spread their ideas through the empty traditions of human beings and the empty superstitions of spirit beings. But that's not the way of Christ.

It's easy to allow other voices in our world and popular culture  
to distract us away from truly trusting God's Word and Truth,  
with impressive sounding intellectual drivel that dazzles,  
that ridicules the simplicity of walking in faith with Jesus,  
or letting Scripture - God's Word be our wisdom and guide.

True faith is not mere human reason and intellectual understanding.  
It's having a personal experience and relationship with God,  
through which God's Holy Spirit inspires & guides our living.

It is saying that we restrain the influences of the world over us  
by placing ourselves actively within a faithful community,  
**where our faith is fed and sustained by God's word  
and by God's abiding presence among the people of God...**  
... by which we learn to live in right-response to God's gracious love.

That is Paul's concern and urgency of this Colossians text.  
It's not that they might turn back and renounce their faith,  
but that in being distracted & confused, their faith weakened,  
**by being troubled and preoccupied with things of this world—**

-- that they might accept **just a mediocre version of Christian life**,  
skim complacently through life mostly seeking comfort & ease,  
and thereby settling for far less than the full measure  
of God's will & full abundance intended for their lives.

Paul wants them to know, understand and trust fully  
that everything they need to live, to grow and prosper in faith,  
has already been revealed through God's love in Jesus Christ. vs. 9-10  
For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is

the head of every ruler and authority.

Paul wants to be sure that they do understand with confidence  
that the Christian life is not something that we figure out  
or that by our own efforts, it is something we can achieve.

**It's entirely something that is given/received by God's grace alone,  
so now** we're alive to respond to Christ's call, to live a new life.

When I served a church in Washington State,  
several members, 'worked in the woods', as loggers.

Have you ever wondered, "**What is the fastest way to cut down a tree?**"

The experts told me,  
that the best way to cut down a tree is to sharpen your saw...

... which might be having the courage to admit when I am off-track,  
to ask what values or assumptions am I holding, that are wrong,  
and consider that I might not be right and I need to change -

-- and as promised according to Scripture, **trust that God  
will bring me to who, what and where God intends for me to be.**

Today we really need to hear and receive that same hopeful message.

For many, our days are difficult, uncertain and challenging.

We are in a strange season of transition toward rebuilding,  
which will require considerable patience, time & tenacity ...

... and above all, **keep our eyes and our hearts focused on Jesus Christ.**

**We are called and enabled to live out our Christian life faith-fully  
in whatever environment, whatever circumstance or context  
God has chosen to place us, for us to live, to grow & to serve,  
holding each other up toward God's will for our lives.**

As the Apostle Paul wrote, (from *The Message*) vs. 2:6-7

My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you've been given. You  
received Christ Jesus, the Master; **now live him.**

You're deeply rooted in him. You're well-constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. **Now  
do what you've been taught.**

School's out; quit studying the subject and **start living it! And let your living spill over into  
thanksgiving.**

**So what is the best and fastest way to cut down a tree?**

**The best way to cut down a tree, is to sharpen your saw,  
and being well-rooted, to strengthen your serve.**