

98-06-12a Colossians

Let's prepare ourselves for the study of the Word of God by beginning with a moment of prayer. Father, we thank you for the privilege of gathering together with believers of like mind. We thank you for the gift of your Word and your Spirit that sustains us and gives our lives direction and purpose, and that gives us the divine enablement to live in a way that pleases you.

We pray tonight as we study this letter that Paul wrote to the Colossians, that God the Holy Spirit will guide our thinking and lead us into the truth so that not only will we come to a right understanding of what is written in these pages, but it will be a truth that makes a difference in our thinking, that shifts our perspective and enables us to see life more nearly as you see it and as you have planned it for us. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We have seen in the past few lessons in Colossians that there is a living church in this dying town. There is a group of individuals there that have responded to the message of the Gospel, who have recognized the importance of relationship with God, even though they live in a culture that is distracted with every other form of thing imaginable. With pagan type culture, with the deviant forms of life and the really immoral lifestyle type of temptations.

We have seen that religion has a foothold there and there are people who are caught up in religion. Just about anything that you can look around and see today in our society is there in Colossae. We are still very prosperous.

We see good economic news. We are at peace. Everybody is happy because supposedly the Cold War is over and we are in a period of prosperity.

The stock market continues to set new records and so forth. In that sense, our country and our culture today, and this could change tomorrow, but today we are a lot more like the towns that were in the other parts of the valley, like Laodicea or even Ephesus or Hierapolis. Young, vibrant, growing, everything seems to be great.

Paul says, I want you to read this letter not only in Colossae, but also in these other towns. If you stop and think about it, there is such a radically different set of circumstances for people in Colossae compared to people in Laodicea, but he says, read this same letter in both places. What that tells us is that these are truths that apply no matter what your circumstances are.

The last time I studied through Colossae on a verse-by-verse basis, most of the folks who were studying along with me were very elderly and were in their twilight years. It was very easy to identify with Colossae and their situation because many of them were retired and felt like their best years were behind them. Well, God is going to be using the young folks now and we are just going to wait.

They have a British show on PBS called Waiting for God. It's about these old people that are in a

retirement home and their trials and tribulations there at the hands of the staff and so forth in the old folks' home. That's where a lot of these people were, so they could identify a lot with the actual circumstances in Colossae where everything seems to be over with and you're sort of a has-been.

We don't find an immediate identification with that, but the interesting thing is Paul tells us at the end of the letter, read this to the young people. And you all read the young people's letter. You read the one I'm writing to Laodicea also.

Even though you're in a small town, even though you're meeting in Philemon's house, it's a little house church, there's just a few people there. Paul doesn't give a big long list of greetings, there's just a few, relatively few people there. But there's important truth here and it's important no matter what your circumstances are.

You can be young and on the upswing. When I was studying literature and we would do Shakespeare and look at the different plays. If you look at Hamlet or any of the plays, Shakespeare is fond of having two characters, one of whom is sort of on the way up and the other one is on the way down.

What they call that is the well bucket analogy. You've got two buckets on a well rope and when you raise one, the other one falls. And that's what goes on in these plays at different times in our lives and sometimes even in different parts of our life.

I'm going to digress because I've been thinking a lot about this. This is sort of a double digression I guess because I've already digressed once to my well bucket thing. But one of the things that I have noticed that I have observed and I have been just as guilty of as anyone else is when you think about life, when you think about spiritual things and you think about life and you start to characterize your life and say, well you're a strong and growing believer or you're a terrible, lackadaisical, apathetic believer.

And we tend to just characterize our entire life as being one adjective. It's good, it's mediocre, it's bad. We're hot, we're lukewarm, we're cold.

And if you listen to sermons on the radio or read books or whatever, they say, well, you know, for the backslider or for the reprobate or for the person that's all unraveled here in their life or for this strong, vibrant, growing, happy, healthy person. If you think about it, generally speaking, our lives are not quite that simple. You can't just use one adjective and say my whole life is going great.

If your experience is normal, and I think it probably is. Everybody's abnormalities are normal. There are areas of your life that you're doing really well and there are other areas that it looks like a bag of rocks.

I mean, it doesn't seem to be making any progress. And so it's a gross oversimplification to just

say, well, everything is good or everything is bad. Generally, there's going to be some areas that you're going to be doing just fine and other areas where you're really having to struggle, and those will shift from time to time.

So your particular well bucket, things that are on the upswing, like the young churches in the Lycus Valley here, that may be some parts of your life. Maybe your social life is doing really well, or maybe your family life at the moment is doing pretty well, or maybe your job is going really well, or maybe it's the reverse. Maybe those are the areas where the old well bucket is sinking down to the bottom of a deep well.

But some other area of life, well, I used to have problems over here, and that problem is not plaguing me right now. It's this other area. The whole point is that when Paul says, read these letters in both places, he writes one letter to the young town with the growing, vibrant, happy church.

He writes another letter to the dying town with the small, little-known, invisible church. But he says, you all trade letters and read them. And what does that tell us? It tells us that the truth that is in these letters applies no matter what your circumstances are, and no matter what part of your life is doing well, and no matter what part of your life is sagging or unraveling or coming apart at the seams, this truth applies.

And it's especially important because we've already seen that the whole reason Paul is writing these letters is Epaphras, the pastor of the little church in Colossae, has come to Paul and he says, look, there is some stuff floating around in our culture. There are ideas and philosophies and these new teachers have come in, and they're claiming to be Christians, and they're saying that A, B, and C is part of the Christian life, and it's not what you taught me. It's not what I've been teaching the church.

And so people are raising their eyebrows and saying, maybe you're not giving us the whole picture here, Epaphras. Maybe we're sitting, soaking and souring, listening to you, and we're missing the big idea out here. These people are saying that we need to be doing more.

We need to be involved in this. We need to be observing that. We're missing out on life.

We don't have the fullness. We're not getting the complete thing just listening to what you're teaching and what Paul taught. They're saying, you know, that's all fine, but there's this other stuff.

And Epaphras is kind of at a loss because everything that he's teaching, these people would affirm. Oh, yes, faith is a wonderful thing. Hope, amen.

Love, absolutely. Life in Christ, salvation in Christ, that's all great. You just don't have the whole picture.

You need these other things as well. You're not complete. So Epaphras, every time he says, but look, the issue is faith.

The issue is hope. The issue is love. They're saying, oh, yeah, great.

All these false teachers are saying, yes, absolutely, we agree. And so he can't find a way to point out what they're adding and where the danger is in what they're trying to add into the Christian life. So he's come to Paul.

He's made the long journey from the Lycus Valley all the way over to Rome. Paul is in prison, and Epaphras has to sort of associate with him, go into some danger there. In fact, he gets imprisoned as well for a time trying to visit with Paul.

He says, Paul, look, here's the situation. I need some help here. I need some advice.

You're an apostle. I'm a pastor. Fill me in.

How can I address this problem? So Paul says, look, I'll sit right down and write a letter to these folks, and I'll explain the difference. And so he writes a letter to Colossae. Then he writes a letter to Laodicea, because this is sweeping the whole region, the whole Phrygian-Asian region.

And then there's also this separate issue that we've talked about with the runaway slave that has come and joined Paul. And lo and behold, this runaway slave's master is the guy that the church meets in his house. Philemon is such a coincidence.

Philemon, who is a friend of Paul's, had this slave. The guy ran away, came to Rome, got hooked up with Paul, became a believer and started learning and growing. And Paul says, look, you need to go back and make this right.

You've got some unfinished business here. You owe something to your master. Of course, that says a lot for people that get all up in arms over slavery and so forth.

Paul didn't say, oh, that slavery's a terrible thing. Philemon should have never had you as a slave in the first place, and I'll write him a letter to straighten him out on slavery. Paul says, look, Onesimus, you go back and serve your master, and I'll write him a letter.

And so these three letters all travel in one pouch. The letter called Ephesians, which was originally addressed to Laodicea, but Ephesus is nearby. The letter to Colossae and the letter to Philemon, who hosts the church in his home there at Colossae.

All three of these letters go in the same pouch. Three different situations, but the same truth shows up in all three letters, because it's a timeless truth. It's a truth that applies to them, it applies to me, and it applies to you.

Whatever your current circumstances are, this is some of the most important truth you can have at your fingertips, your mental fingertips, to apply, to make a difference in your life. There is nothing more important than what we're about to see. And he's going to launch right off with it here in Colossians.

And having done enough introduction now, we're going to launch right into it as well. So we resume our study this morning. By the way, for those that were following along on tape, I had just started verse 3 last time, and I said, we give thanks to God, our Father, grace to you and peace and so forth.

Well, take heart. We decided that was a good place to stop, and you didn't miss anything. So, Paul says in verse 2, at the end of verse 2, he says, grace to you and peace.

We've already seen that Paul has manufactured his own unique sort of a greeting here. It combines the Greek greeting, which is grace to you, *kyrein*, and peace, which is *shalom*, the Hebrew greeting. And he puts them together and sort of covers all the bases.

If there are Greeks in the audience, if there are Jews in the audience, they're all covered. Grace to you, peace to you. Not only that, but we're going to see that these two concepts, grace and peace, bracket everything that Paul is about to say.

Because the Christian life begins with grace and it culminates in peace. We start with the grace of God. We start with what God gives to us.

And when we latch onto that, when we seize it by faith, when it generates in us hope and we begin to operate in love, the result in our soul is peace. It's the peace that passes understanding. It's the peace that Jesus told the disciples in the upper room, this is the peace I give to you.

This is the peace I leave with you. This is what everybody is looking for, isn't it? You look around at the world, look at all the people on the funny talk shows and the various problems that you hear people discussing in the workplace or wherever. What is everyone really looking for? People don't have peace.

They say, you know, I'm lacking something. I'm missing something. I'm not happy with the way things are.

I'm looking to the future. I want something new. I want something better.

I don't have a relationship and I want one. I don't have a job and I want one. I don't have something.

There's a void in my life and, you know, whatever it may be. And this starts early on in school, long about junior high and high school. People start looking around and, you know, there's the popular crowd and I'm not.

Or there's, look at them, they're maturing earlier than me. The girls have blossomed better. The boys have muscled up better or whatever.

And that continues all the way through our life. And we say, ah, there's something just not quite there. People are looking for peace.

The only place to find peace is in God. God the Father. He is the God of peace.

And that's the only genuine lasting peace. You can shovel a lot of stuff into that void and it will seemingly fill that void for a time. But it's like shoveling sand into something that has no bottom.

It just, it drains away. And that thing, this is why people never find happiness in whatever they try. If they try substances or substance abuse, if they try relationships or relationship abuse, if they try achievement, power, whatever you want to name, whatever you want to look for, you think for a time, well, now I'm getting there.

But, you know, read any interview with a movie star who's got fame and fortune and so forth and ask them, well, did this, you know, now that you've won the Emmy, now that you as a musician have gotten the Grammy, do you have peace? They say, yeah, you know, I'm at the top of the mountain, everything is great, I'm just going to revel and bask. They always say, no, you know, I'm looking for a new challenge, I want a new, because it doesn't satisfy, it doesn't last. There's only one lasting peace in the world.

And you waste your life chasing after the wind if you don't identify and find the way to the peace of God. That's what Paul is going to talk about in this letter. Because he knows that the people who are being sold this bill of goods up in the Lycus Valley are going to find this ashes in the mouth result.

They may go down the religion trail. Most of them have already been down the pagan immorality trail. They may go down the false philosophy trail.

Any of those four things that we identified last time that are being put forward, asceticism, self-denial, the Spartan life, that's how you're going to find fulfillment and peace. Well, they're going to try it and they're going to find, you know, I keep having to look ahead because I don't have it today. I'm going to get it tomorrow.

And the old thing, tomorrow, never comes. This is one of the few interesting things that this gal, Madonna, has ever said. And, you know, I would have never thought that I would even quote her, but I heard or read or saw someplace that she has come to a profound understanding.

See, she's already been this mega pop music person. She's had her movie thing and done Evita. She's had a child and done the mothering.

She's never got a marriage going or anything, but she does have a child. And she said, this is

one thing she said, and it actually has a grain of truth in it. She said, you know, I've been living all my life up to this point, always looking ahead and saying, you know, I've got to go to the next challenge.

I've got to find this next goal. I've got to achieve this next thing. And she said, I realized just recently that it never comes.

And I'm spending my whole life looking ahead and I'm never finding that satisfaction. No matter what I achieve, no matter how far I get, it never fulfills. She said, so I'm now, I'm trying to look in the present.

I'm trying to live for the moment and find my satisfaction in the present. So this is her new thing. Unfortunately, she's going to find the same thing.

That looking in the present, the present doesn't last very long, does it? It's here and it's gone. And now you've got a new present and a new circumstance. And if your happiness depends on your circumstances, if your happiness depends on people, if your happiness depends on the details of your life, your happiness is not going to last.

Because your circumstances don't last. People don't last. Things don't last.

Situations don't last. And therefore, any happiness based on them doesn't last. And so, where is the peace? Well, Paul, even in his greeting, brackets this whole idea that he's going to present in the letter to Colossians.

He says, grace to you, my wish for you, my thought for you is the grace of God and the peace that passes understanding. It's going to start with grace and it's going to end up at peace. And those of you, those of us, those in the realm of believers who have had a taste of the peace of God, you know what it's like.

You know its permanence. You know its enduring eternal quality. You know that it fills the void in your soul like nothing else can.

And when that lack is truly filled with a divine peace, your circumstances really diminish in importance. And you find, it's amazing how much patience I have. It's amazing that I am still happy and people are coming up to me saying, oh, wow, I can't believe what happened to you.

I can't believe your circumstances. I can't believe what this person did to you or how this thing has turned out or what happened in your job or your relationship. Somebody just stabbed you in the back and I see this big gaping wound.

What's the matter? I would expect you to be ranting and raving and upset and shaking your fist and you just seem to be so calm. That's what comes when the peace of God fills your soul because you are no longer a slave to circumstances. Your life and your happiness and your

thinking are not even conditioned on circumstances or people anymore.

You can appreciate them. You can enjoy them. You can deal with them.

You can cope with them, whatever they are, because there's something that transcends that's on the inside. That's what Paul is talking about. He's not just dashing off a greeting like dear friends, dear church.

When he says grace to you and peace, peace means something to Paul. We're going to see some of those passages tonight. So I don't want to give that short shrift.

When he says grace to you and peace, what is the source? This is not, well, I hope things are going well, we say this in letters, hope this finds you well. Like wellness is just sort of an abstract thing that hopefully you stumbled into or fell down into or whatever. Paul says grace to you and peace from.

There is a place where these things come and it is the eternal, abiding, unchangeable source of grace and peace. It's God, our Father. If your Bible says and the Lord Jesus Christ, we hesitate to line out the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is why it's probably in your Bible, but it's really not in the letter.

And the reason is Paul is saving the subject of the Lord Jesus Christ for his next paragraph. He says grace to you and peace from God, our Father. He's got Jesus Christ on his mind, but he's saving it.

He's going to introduce him in this next paragraph and he's going to go at length about the Lord Jesus Christ. But look at verse 3. He says we give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now stop and think about this.

He could have just said we give thanks to God and we would know who he's talking about, right? Why does he say we give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ here? Well, I can think of two reasons. One is he's now ready to introduce the subject of the Lord Jesus Christ. If he had used it in the previous verse, it would have been kind of redundant because he's going to go on and talk about Christ a third time in this same paragraph.

But secondly, how many different ways can you view God the Father? Is he just an essence box? When you think of God the Father, do you think of sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, eternal life, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability and veracity? You say, oh, God the Father, there he is, essence box. Do you ever think about God the Father in personal terms or is he the great distant God judge in the sky? People imagine him as this great white bearded far off distant thing. Jesus is the personal, he's the one I'm comfortable with.

God the Father kind of scares me, sort of a thing. Well, Paul presents God the Father in terms of Jesus Christ. He says, if you like Jesus Christ, if you are comfortable with Jesus Christ, if you

appreciate him and understand him and his compassion and his willing sacrifice of himself on our behalf, just remember that the God we're talking about here, the God of grace and the God of peace, is the God that sent that Jesus Christ to you.

He begot him. He incarnated him in the flesh. He is the one that gave us that great gift.

So, it ought to condition our thinking about God the Father. He shouldn't be a far off distant, sort of semi-scary, sort of a judging entity in our minds. Jesus said, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father.

He's just like me. He's just as compassionate. He's just as patient.

He's just as forgiving. He's just as caring. He's just as self-sacrificing.

What does John 3.16 say about God the Father? For God so loved the world. It doesn't say, for Jesus Christ so loved the world that he came down and gave himself, does it? But we tend to forget that. John 3.16 is about God the Father.

He is the God who was compassionate and loving and sent Jesus Christ, gave his only begotten Son. You think about a family that's only got one child and he goes off to war and dies or he's killed in some other fashion. You think they've lost the scion of the family, their future, everything they counted on.

They invested all of this time raising this young son perhaps and he goes off to war and gets killed and that's it. They're too old to have any more children. Guess the way God illustrates himself to us.

Jesus Christ is his only begotten Son and he gave him for us when we were hopeless, helpless and useless. So what's the idea here? When you look at this greeting and any greeting in the epistles, stop and remember that God the Father is a loving, a genuinely loving, genuinely compassionate God. He is near to all those who call on him.

He's not far off. He's not distant. He's not just watching to see how you mess up so that he can hammer you into dust.

He's patient. He has compassion that goes for a thousand generations to those that care about him, that ever think about him and ever wonder if he's pleased and think, you know, I really ought to try to give God the respect and the honor that is due him in my life. If you have that attitude, if God is so overjoyed that any of us ever develop that attitude, he is going to go out of his way to bless and to give you grace and peace.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, it says here in the New King James. Now, there's two verbal ideas going on here.

One of the two actions that Paul says he's in and praying. And if you look in the letters, these are always linked. If you see Paul praying, you see Paul giving thanks.

And you can already probably think of verses where these two concepts come together. In everything, give thanks. This is the will of God concerning you.

What's the verse over in Philippians? In everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God. In that context and almost any context you want to name, when you see prayer, you see thanksgiving. Paul tells Timothy, I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer and give thanks.

These two concepts are linked. I won't give you a laundry list of verses on that. You can find that for yourself.

But we see it again here, don't we? The first one there, we give thanks. This is your regular present active indicative for you Greek fans. It says we give thanks, we are giving thanks, this is what we do.

And then you have a participle for the praying part. And it says the idea here is whenever we pray and you all come up in the prayer, we don't say, oh boy, help those poor old Colossians. They are in such dire straits.

The first thought in Paul's mind when he thinks of the Colossians isn't, oh, they've got problems, I need to pray for them. What about our prayer life? When somebody comes up in our mind, we think, oh, I need to pray for them. What's the first thought that comes to our mind? We think, oh, they've got problems, I better pray.

Or do we think, I am so glad, I want to tell God how glad I am about this person. It's kind of a different thought process going on in prayer. And if we want to grow and follow the path that Paul has followed to get to where he is as an apostle, we need to shift our thinking a little bit as well.

Prayer is not a begging list. Oh God, please. Oh God, please.

Oh God, look at the hurting, look at the pain, look at the problems. Oh God. We know, well, you are supposed to do these other things, so we stack those up at the front of the prayer so we can get to the good part, which is really where our heart is.

God, thank you for this day, thank you for everything you've given us. Now, here's why I really came before you. Oh God.

And we try to mix in somebody else's request, but we generally put ours in there first. Oh God, look at the problem I've got here. Please help me, please solve this, take this away, this is painful.

When Paul prays, Thanksgiving is a real thing to him. Why? How can Thanksgiving be a real

thing to us? How can we start out our prayers genuinely and enthusiastically in a thanks mode? Well, it's his perspective. The reason Paul is thankful is when he looks at people, the first thing he thinks of isn't their problem, it isn't their deficit, it's their resources, it's their standing in God.

I'm going to do a little exercise here. We're going to look just real quickly at the prayers of Paul just in his epistles, just in the greetings, just like what we're seeing here in Colossians. And I want you to watch for two things.

Watch and see if Paul says anything about being thankful. This was your homework assignment last week. Look and see if Paul is being thankful for anything.

And if so, how did he get to this thankfulness? What generated his idea of being thankful when he was praying? And then we'll see if there's any way we can do that for ourselves. What's the first little mini pop quiz here? In the New Testament, what's the first epistle of Paul? Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans. So turn to Romans 1. If you look at the end of verse 7, you're going to see something familiar.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace. He's got that same envelope in mind.

It starts with grace, it results in peace. Look at verse 8. First, I thank my God. Here's the answer to our question in Romans.

What is he thankful for? I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all. Why? Because your faith is spoken of throughout the world. We're going to be watching because Paul is going to talk in Colossians chapter 1 about faith, hope, and love.

In fact, he's going to talk in just about anything, chapter 1, about faith, hope, and love because that is the engine that drives the Christian life. That is the summation of what you and I are here to live. So he says, when he thinks about the people he's writing to in Romans, he says, I thank my God whenever I think about you because your faith, you all are characterized by faith.

You've got some faith going on there. You've trusted in Christ for salvation, and you've got some more faith going on beyond that. Now, he doesn't talk about hope here in Romans chapter 1, and he doesn't talk about their love in Romans chapter 1. So this tells us Paul's mental estimate of where this particular group is.

He says, you've taken the first step. You've got your foot on the path here. You've got faith, and your faith is spoken of throughout the world.

He's going to work on through the letter to try to leverage or parlay their faith into the other two attributes and get this three-cycle engine operating. He says, you all have got this faith, and the gospel of Jesus Christ that you've got your faith in, that is what's going to get you going. That's where the power is.

When you put faith in this gospel, when you put faith in this truth that I'm about to give you, this gospel is not just believe in Christ and be saved from the lake of fire, is it? Gospel means the plan of God for the life of the believer. That's what gospel means. And if you're an evangelist and you're sharing the gospel, what are you telling people? You're not saying, here's your free ticket away from the lake of fire.

You're saying, here is your entrance into relationship with God. Here is your first step to a life with God. And the gospel comprehends not just the first step, but the whole path, the whole walk down the road.

And we've so limited gospel. We say, well, gospel, believe in the Lord. People boil it down in seminary.

What are the minimum elements of the gospel? Well, do you have to believe He's the Son of God? Do you have to believe that He died and rose again? Do you have to believe that He ascended? How much do you have to believe? We miss the whole point of the gospel. The gospel, that's like going to the military and saying, the whole point of the military is recruiting. All we want to do is just sign them up.

Just get them to sign up. And that's all recruiters think about for their little two year, I've just got to make my quota so I don't get hammered on my fitness report. I've just got to get 50 guys to sign up this month, or 50 gals, or 50 anybody's.

I'll take corpses. I'll take anything that walks and has a birth certificate. And when we boil Christianity down to recruiting, we miss the point.

We don't have a military so we can run around and recruit. That's not our mission. Recruiting is essential, but it's only one small part.

It's the same thing true here. So, Paul says, I thank God because you've got faith. So he thinks about something positive.

You know the old thing, if you can't think of something good, then just don't say anything? Well, Paul thinks, well, you know, this group, they really haven't arrived at the point where I can commend them for love. I can't really go to God and say, boy, look at that Roman crowd, they've got so much love, they've got so much hope. But they've got faith.

They've gotten a latch on the first step. So I thank God for that. Look at 1 Corinthians 1. You know the issue in Corinth.

That's a big troubled church. They've got all kinds of problems. They've gotten distracted, they're divided, they're wrestling over, they're tolerating this guy sleeping with his stepmother and so forth.

So, Paul, when he thinks of them, he can't think of anything that's really going for them. But he still starts out his letter with thanks. How does he do it? Look at 1 Corinthians 1. I thank my God always where you are concerned.

When I think about you, and I'm looking for something to be thankful for, I can't say I'm thankful for your faith. I can't say I'm thankful for your hope. I can't say I'm thankful for your love.

I thank God for His grace. Because grace is the entrance point for you. And you're standing at the entrance to the door.

So I thank my God concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus. I thank God that you've got an entry point. All is not lost.

You're not a hopeless case. The grace is there. So Paul finds a way to be thankful for this really messed up group.

He says, well, you know, I can't really be thankful for anything specific to you, but I thank God for His grace that even you are standing right there on the grace threshold. Grace to you and peace. He says the same thing to them in verse 3, by the way, doesn't he? My hope for you is grace, the entry point.

I hope you make it all the way through and find the peace of God that passes understanding. Look at 2 Corinthians. You think, well, they've had some time.

There's probably some gap there between 1 and 2 Corinthians. Maybe they've made some progress. Paul doesn't even specifically use the word thanks in 2 Corinthians chapter 1. He probably says, well, you know, I don't want to be too obvious here that I can't really find something to be thankful for.

So he says, blessed be God. This is the same thing as saying, thanks be to God, isn't it? It's virtually synonymous. Look at verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.

When he turns to thankfulness, he turns to God. He says, well, you know, you all are still a little iffy on the Corinthian front there as far as faith, hope, and love or any real progress that you've made. But God, I bless God.

God is the God of comfort. He's the God of mercy. You're still there at the grace threshold.

He comforts us in tribulation so that we can comfort others even when we suffer and we're afflicted, God's grace and God's mercy are sufficient. So if the subject doesn't generate any grounds for thankfulness, Paul turns to God and says, boy, thank God for His grace. Thank God for His mercy.

Thank God for the comfort that He comforts us with because all Paul can think about when he thinks about the Corinthians at this point is affliction. So that's what he does there. Turn over, what's our next book? 1 Corinthians and Galatians.

Now the church in Galatia, the believers in Galatia with this big legalism problem, Paul is deeply upset that after all of his work and all of his teaching and his traveling and the great stand that he has made against the religion that has deflected and distracted everyone, the Galatians ought to know better. Paul has been there and taught them. He says, you foolish Galatians, who has fooled you? You started out in grace.

I presented to you the grace of God. You were saved in the power of the Holy Spirit. How can these people be fooling you and leading you by the nose down the wrong path? So what does he say at the beginning of this one? Look at Galatians 1.3. Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The same opportunity that every church has. He says, here's God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. He's the one that gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil age.

What's on Paul's mind when he thinks about the believers in Galatia? You all are enmeshed in this present evil age. Jesus died to deliver you out of this mess. And he says, the glory goes to God the Father.

The glory goes to Jesus Christ. That's what he says in verse 5. Then in verse 6, when he turns his thoughts back to the believers in Galatia, what does he say? I marvel that you are turning away so soon from the One who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel. You all, standing at the threshold of grace, are letting people lead you away somewhere else.

I say grace to you and peace, but you're letting somebody just drag you away from the door. And you're not even going to get to go in. It's not even close to faith, hope, and love for Galatians.

Turn over to the next one, Ephesians. This is the letter to Laodicea that Paul mentions at the end of Colossians. He says, to the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus who are in Ephesus is not there.

Verse 2 of Ephesians 1, grace to you and peace. Paul's pretty consistent here, isn't he? When he thinks about a church and he thinks about the believers there, he says, you know, you've got the entry point of God's grace. You've got the opportunity to arrive at the place of that great divine peace.

He says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Here's all of the things that he has done. He goes on to talk about all of these great spiritual blessings.

And he saves the thankfulness for the individuals to verse 15. You think, well, maybe these people are in the Galatian category. Paul is just going to bless God when he thinks about them because there's nothing good to say.

But after spending time talking about God and the wonderful hope that is stored up, then in verse 15 he says, because of all of this great grace, these wonderful spiritual blessings that God has laid up for you, he says in verse 15, therefore, I also, when I hear of your faith and your love, here's a group that is latching on. They're making progress just like the Colossians. He says, look, you all have entered in the grace door.

You've seized hold of it by faith. You've actually started to have this divine love that no human can generate. It's a supernatural love.

It's a love that enables you to have an attitude that nobody can just wish on themselves. He says, I've heard of your faith. I've heard of your love for all the saints.

I do not cease to give thanks for you and making mention of you in my prayers. Then he goes on to say what he prays for them. But he says, I give thanks to God for you because I've heard of your faith and I've heard of your love.

He says, when I think of you believers, I hear about the evidence of your faith. I see the manifestation of that genuine love. Now, how do you know that believers have love? If you're going to pray for a believer and you say, I want to be thankful for them like Paul is, what is the evidence of love in their life? Well, boy, look at the way they showed up and did something.

What is the evidence? They really did a kindness to me. What exactly is the manifestation of love? Well, after the break, we're going to see, as we go through the Scripture, how you tell whether or not that love is cooking in our own lives, first of all. And then when we think of others and get ready to be thankful and to pray for others, if that's a grounds for thankfulness, or if we need to pray the prayers of Paul, well, thanks be to God for his mercy.

And I pray that these believers will come to enter through that grace door and lay hold of it by faith. How do we measure? First and most importantly, how do we measure ourselves? Where do we stand with regard to faith and hope and love? We'll see that and a couple more of these introductions when we come back.