



“No Pain, No Gain”
Colossians 1:24-29
January 9, 2022

This is a picture of Pastor Paul and Eunice Dirks. Along with many people who have been a part of Bethel Grace for a while, they hold a special place in my heart as I know they do in yours as well. Pastor Paul was the senior pastor of Bethel Grace all through the decades of the 90s into the early years of the new millennium. Eunice was right there by his side, pouring out from herself by the Spirit into our lives here at this church.

Pastor Paul was my pastor. I had the privilege of not only of experiencing his pastoral care in ministry in the 90s, but also coming on staff here at the church in 1998, being under his leadership in that way.

This week I was thinking about an occasion that we had here at Bethel Grace. It was some kind of celebration but in all honesty, I do not remember just what it was that we were celebrating, but there were a lot of people and guests here. Maybe we were burning the mortgage or having a missions conference.

I don't remember what the precise occasion was but I do very clearly remember a conversation that took place right outside on the patio. Pastor Paul was there talking to one of the guests here at Bethel Grace. I was a young man and I was listening in on that conversation. This man was asking Pastor Paul about his experience as a pastor.

Pastor Paul was telling him about his time here at Bethel Grace and his time back at the Church of the Open Doors, serving with Dr. J. Vernon McGee. The gentlemen asked Pastor Paul how long he had been serving in pastoral ministry. Pastor Paul said that he had been serving in pastoral ministry for about forty or forty-five years.

I will never forget what came next. The man said, “Wow, over four decades. That’s wonderful.” Then almost under his breath, and I don’t know if that man even heard Pastor Paul say it but I heard him say it. Pastor Paul said, “Yes, and I have got the scars to prove it.”

I don't think I will ever forget that moment. It affected me, not only in terms of my admiration for that man who was serving the Lord and had been through the school of hard knocks and was then finishing his ministry well, but also in terms of me being a young seminary student just starting off asking, “Wow, what’s the path going to hold for me?”

Pain is a part of the growth of the church. No pain, no gain. This is especially the case in the lives of those who are going to be used of God to bring growth into the lives of other people. If you are going to be used of God to bring Christ to unbelievers, if you are going to be used of the Lord to help shape Christlikeness in the hearts and lives of those who do believe, there will be a price tag. Your heart will hurt. That’s the reality.

When the Gospel of Christ is spread among unbelievers, some people do in fact react against the messengers. And in the life of the local church, guess what, we are a bunch of people redeemed; we are a bunch of people saved, but we still do have the ongoing presence of sin in our lives and would you believe me if I told you that sometimes Christians wound other Christians?

I wonder if you have ever been wounded by another Christian. I wonder if you have ever wounded another Christians. Maybe that is a harder question. Pain is a part of it. Yet even in the midst of this, there is supernatural power that not only sustains but even invigorates the lives of those who are in the midst of such ministerial sufferings.

With the presence of the Spirit filling our lives and with the truth of God's Word illuminating us on the inside and helping us to see the glory of what we are a part of, by the grace of God, the glory will outweigh the pain. So in the power of Jesus who is with us, we press forward in joy that is supernaturally provided.

This is has been the testimony of countless servants of God through the ages and we will see this as we once again enter into the book of Colossians this morning. Colossians was a letter written to an early New Testament church in a small declining town that was called Colossae . This church was being threatened with false doctrine.

The Apostle Paul being informed of this wrote to them. Not only did he present to them this view of the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ in order to fortify them in His sufficiency, but the Colossians also needed to be prepared for the mental and emotional and perhaps even physical pain that they would experience because of their stand for the Lord Jesus Christ.

So as we move forward into the next section, the Apostle Paul got personal. He spoke to the believers in Colossae and in California about his experience as a minister of the kingdom and as a minister of the Goepel and as a servant of Christ. Paul spoke very forthrightly about the suffering and pain that he experienced for the sake of the growth and the maturity of the church.

But even in the midst of this, this man bearing testimony of his experience spoke of the joy that God was manifesting in him even in suffering Paul presents this to us and, brothers and sisters, it is set forth as an example for all of those who would be used of the Lord to bring Christ and Christlikeness to other people.

Let us read what is here for us in Colossians Chapter 1 and Verses 24 through 29:

⁴Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶the mystery hidden from ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching

everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

So we have this great man of God, the Apostle Paul, sharing his experience of ministry with all of us. To start off with, I just want to for us to notice the vocabulary of pain that frames the paragraph that we just read. Did you notice it?

The language of suffering and affliction is in Verse 24:

²⁴Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church

Then there is the language of toil and struggle in Verse 29:

²⁹For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

This is how Paul speaks of his experience, helping the church grow in number and in maturity. That is quite an assortment of words, isn't it? But if there is anything that really grabs our attention in what we just read, I wonder if it is the statement that is in Verse 24, when Paul said:, "And in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. " Now what in the world does Paul mean by that?

How can anything be said to be lacking in the afflictions of Jesus Christ? Was the shedding of the blood of the Unblemished Lamb of God somehow insufficient for the cleansing of our sins? Did the atonement that took place at the crucifixion of God Incarnate only go so far to pay the price for our sins, so that we have to go and take it a little bit further? What in the world is Paul talking about when he says, "In my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in relation to the afflictions of Jesus Christ"?

How can anything be said to be lacking in His affliction? What we must understand is that Paul is not saying that there is something lacking in the atoning value and power of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sinners like us.

The book of Colossians is all about not only the supremacy of Jesus Christ in His person, but the overflowing sufficiency of Jesus Christ in His sacrifice for the sins of His people. In Christ we have more than we will ever need and in Christ and in the cross of Jesus Christ, we have that which is completely and finally and singularly capable of taking care of the human sin problem. I hope we are clear on that.

But what are we talking about here when there is still the language in inspired Scripture about what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ? There is a British commentator from the 1800s I think by the name of J.B. Lightfoot who offered two terms that help us to understand this. We need to distinguish between the redemptive sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ and the ministerial sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The two are related but the two are distinct. By the redemptive sufferings of Jesus Christ, we are talking about His perfect life. We are talking about His substitutional death. We are talking about His bodily resurrection for the sake of sinners like us. The redeeming suffering of Jesus Christ was complete when He died, making atonement on the cross with His last breath, He cried out, "It is finished." Mission accomplished!

Moving forward, understand that even while we understand that in His atoning death, Christ alone provides the forgiveness of all our sin, there is also something that Christ commissions His church with. Now understand that for those who are saved, there is something that Christ carries out through those whom He has redeemed, and that is spreading the good news of the cross and the resurrection across the face of the earth.

That ministerial calling of Christ is going to in fact involve some suffering in the lives of His people. There will be an element of pain. Listen again in Verses 13 and 14 of Colossians Chapter 1:

¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

All of those things are achieved. Done. There has been deliverance, redemption, and forgiveness.

We have been delivered from the domain of darkness, but now as those who are alive in Christ, having been delivered from the domain of darkness, we still live in the domain of darkness and Christ sends us into a world that is fallen in darkness and in sin to shed the light of the glory of the goodness and the grace of Jesus Christ.

As we do, we will face some challenges and some pain and some difficulty. These are the ministerial sufferings of Christ that are being filled up through the ministry of the church, the body of Christ, that are joined to the Messiah, who is the Head. This is what the Lord calls us to be a part of.

Here we see Paul, he is giving himself to us as an example of this and he is even able to say, by the work of God in him, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. He was speaking not only to the Colossians, but to the entire Gentile world that God was calling him to reach.

So we see what was happening in Paul's life but let's understand this: this is not given only to inform us about a precious man of God named Paul, who was filled with the Spirit in the First Century. This is given to transform us into those who will follow in this calling; to deny ourselves daily, to take up our cross and to follow Jesus as we spread the good news of the message of forgiveness in Christ alone.

This is given to us that we too might be made willing by the work of God in us to take pains in the call to spread the knowledge of Jesus Christ and to build people up in the faith. Pain and hardship and heavy-heartedness is a part of it, mingled with gladness and worship and joy.

We see Paul firing away here. However, before things even reach the point of being painful, and even when things begin to be slightly uncomfortable, is it just me or do self-preservation instincts start kicking in? Am I the only one who knows what it is to have pain avoidance mechanisms getting triggered?

That is the tendency of so many of us. There is an idol in the western world and it is the idol of a life of comfort and it afflicts the church to. It often comes with its sister, ease. Comfort and ease! Easy-peasy is how we want life to be.

But if we are going to be those used of the Lord to bring the knowledge of Christ to people and to bring Christlikeness into the people that God has joined us to, those idols of comfort and ease need to be taken from the altar and thrown down to the ground and broken to pieces, because all throughout the pages of Scripture, we see that suffering is a normative experience in the Christian life.

There is the comfort of God in the midst of our afflictions. There is a lot that the Bible has to say about comfort. However, here in the western world, we want a life that is absolutely defined by cushions and bon-bons and ease. This is just what we want, and we are very intolerant of interruptions with pain, when the Scriptures are testifying to us that as we are joined in Christ and following Him in His mission in the world, there is going to be a lot of discomfort involved.

It was to all of the disciples in Lystra in Acts 14:22 that Paul said, it is:

22...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

As we read earlier, Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:12:

¹²All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

We all have the tendency within to self-protect and to preserve. This idolatry is alive in me and I think in many of us and we need to say, "Lord, fill me with Your presence and help me to live in another way by the power of Your grace.

Understand that this kind of Christian living is not because we become masochists who enjoy pain when we come to Christ. Not at all! It is because there is a greater glory and a greater pleasure that is going to drive us forward by the power of the Spirit living inside of us. That's why Paul said, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. I see awesome things happening as a result of the hardship of the ministry"

So we need the Lord to be helping us, to be raising us up out of our tendencies of self-preservation, so that we will see a greater vision that we get to walk with Jesus. We need Jesus to raise us up in this.

Brothers and sisters, this portion of Scripture is given to us to that end. It is here to help us to see the glory of the vision of helping people know Christ and to grow in Christ, that we might have

endurance in the midst of the challenges that are a part of that; and even sometimes the tears and the heartache that is also a part of that.

Let's look at these aspects of what was fueling Paul. Let's see how it is that Paul was able to say, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings." As we see what was driving Paul, causing him to have endurance in the midst of the hard things, let us pray that the Lord will be activating us in such a way that whenever things get uncomfortable with the people that we are trying to reach, instead of walking the other way, we face things straight on, knowing that glorious things happen when we endure.

Let's pray that this testimony that comes from a man named Paul but was empowered by the Holy Spirit, will manifest itself and live in us. God's Word is living and active. Let's see three aspects of the ministry vision that was propelling this brother in Christ forward.

First we will talk about how we need to marvel at the mystery; how we need to really appreciate the purpose of it all; then how we need to experience the energy. Paul speaks about these things here in this text.

To endure ministerial sufferings with Christ, first:

1. Let's marvel at the mystery (1:26-27)

That is what Paul was doing. Did you notice that here?

²⁶the *mystery* hidden from ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this *mystery*, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Now this word *mystery* is an interesting word that appears all throughout Paul's letter. It is an interesting term in his vocabulary. It occurs about twenty times in his letters, speaking of various aspects of new covenant, New Testament doctrine.

It is used twice in the paragraph that we are looking at this morning. It is going to be used again in the paragraph that we will be digging into next week. As we understand this mystery and as we want to marvel at it as well, we need to understand that a mystery is not necessarily something that is difficult to understand.

A mystery in the New Testament is not necessarily a riddle that needs to be solved. Instead, a mystery is something that was hidden that is now made known. In Old Testament days, it was veiled. It was behind a curtain, so to speak. Now in New Testament days, that veil is pulled back and we see this glorious aspect of God's saving grace in the life of the church. So we see Paul, he has this mystery that he is marveling at here in this text.

This whole section of Verses 25 through 29 is a long sentence from Paul, mercifully broken down into shorter sentences for us to digest but here in the midst of it, Paul boils down the mystery to seven life-changing words. What are they?

What is this mystery the Paul is blown away about? It is this:

²⁶the mystery hidden from ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Christ in you, the hope of glory! This is something that was just lighting this man up on the inside, propelling him forward as Jesus was revealing it to him.

The coming of Christ, this was not a mystery. In the Old Testament, the appearance of the Messiah is prophesied over and over again. In fact, the deity of the Messiah is not a mystery either. That was revealed very clearly in the Old Testament in Isaiah Chapter 9 and Verse 6. We talked about that on Christmas Eve. The suffering of the Messiah was not a mystery. That was clearly revealed in Isaiah Chapter 53.

However, now Paul is understanding and seeing something new and unexpected. Not only does Christ come to deliver His people, not only does the Christ come to reside with His people, but the Living Christ comes to indwell His people; to enter into them so that, just like in Old Testament days in the tabernacle and in the temple, the Shekinah Glory would fill the temple.

So the presence of the Messiah now comes to reside within each one that is saved by His grace. This is the great doctrine of the indwelling of Christ in His people. Think of the One that we saw described in that wonderful hymn contained in Verses 15 through 20 of Chapter 1. This exalted and glorious One, the Creator of all things coming to dwell in the hearts of His people. That is an awesome reality, and Paul was seeing it in the lives of people before his eyes and it was propelling him forward.

There was another aspect of this that for a converted Pharisee like Paul, it just caused his mind to blow, because not only was the Messiah coming to deliver and reside with and dwell in the Jewish people, but the Messiah was coming to dwell within the hearts of the people that come to Him from all tongues and tribes and nations.

Paul was seeing this taking place and the potential of it all triggered in him. This is what was propelling him. He was marveling at this mystery, something not revealed in the Old Testament, now experienced in the New. Christ dwelling in people, making His presence observable through the work that He is doing in their lives, changing them, forgiving them, cleansing them, making them new.

Paul was saying that it was marvelous! This aspect of the whole Gentile world coming to the understanding from all of the nations, that is what Paul is getting at. Especially the Jewish saints, they were coming to realize how great among the Gentiles is the glory of this mystery. Like there were more Gentiles being saved than Jews, and they were being lit up by it all.

Paul reinforced this in a coming chapter and verse when he said, here in the body, here in the church:

¹¹Heere there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3:11)

There it is again, this indwelling of Christ whatever their race, age, social standing, male or female—when their hearts are being brought to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, Christ is entering into them. Christ is all. Christ is in all, in all of these different kinds of people.

Not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles, and the Greeks. Not only the Greeks but even the barbarians. Even those savages. Even a particular portion of those savages, the worst of the worst, the Scythians. We will talk about this later on, but it is like progressively worse and worse. And Paul was saying, “Christ is entering into them. They are being saved and it is glorious and it is marvelous.

This is half of the mystery. There is a two-part mystery. Christ in you and what does that secure? Glory! So for all who are coming to faith in Christ, Christ indwells and the time is coming when Christ will glorify them. It is not only the indwelling of the believer but ultimately the glorification of the believer.

When we talk about the doctrine of glorification, this is a matter of partaking in the glory of Almighty God. This does not mean that you as a Christian will someday become an inherently glorious being. There is one inherently glorious being, the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit. You will always be a human being; a created being,

But you will be one who is glorified by virtue of the fact that you someday will be in the very direct presence of the Living God. His presence and His power and His truth and His love is going to saturate you to the fullness extent possible for a created being. It is going to take a resurrection for you to be able to experience that, by the way.

We are going to be a part of this kingdom that lasts forever and ever and ever and ever. To be a part of that we need new bodies that are designed to last forever and ever. The mortal bodies are done away with, resurrection bodies are granted at the return of Christ. We will be dwelling in eternal glory forever—laughing, dancing, rejoicing, being thrilled in the new creation. And Christ in you is the hope of glory.

Hope being a word of certainty. Hope is not a question mark word. What kind of word is hope? It an exclamation point word! Hope is not a fingers crossed kind of experience. It is a fist-pump experience. This is going to happen! The resurrection of Christ makes this possible and secures it as Christ comes to dwell within His people.

This is the mystery that Paul was marveling at—the nations joined and united in the Messiah in this way with eternal glory to come. Paul was seeing this field of harvest with this vision. That is Paul and that is the doctrine. Now how about your life?

Will you ask God to fill your heart and your eyes with such perspective of those that He has brought into your life, that you will have visions of them with Christ indwelling them and them

basking in the glory of the Messiah forevermore. Will you ask God to fill you. I need to ask Him to fill me in this way, because I become timid too often. Can we ask God to work in us in such a way that that kind of vision will move us forward to have conversations with people that something within us resists? We need God to overcome this.

Who is in your life? Who is God giving a front row seat to the kingdom of God because they know you? Will you pray that God will overcome the tendency to hold back and that He will move you forward, even if it becomes uncomfortable and even if it has pain, because there is the possibility that they will come to faith and Christ is then alive in them. Discomfort, even pain, is part of that, but it is pain that is driven by a vision of greater glory.

By the way, a shameless plug for a gathering that is going to happen at the end of the month to help us with that, Love Thy Neighbor. Just helping us to hold each other accountable in that, because we need it. It will also give us some approaches to help prepare us for this kind of thing.

So, how is it that we can have transformation that works from the inside out, so that we will endure ministerial sufferings with Christ? First, we need to be marveling at the mystery. Moving forward, and with all this Christlikeness already becoming evident, let's pray this would be the case as well:

To endure ministerial sufferings with Christ:

2. Let's appreciate the purpose (1:28)

Appreciate it in terms that is similar to marveling at it. What is it that Paul was going for as he was reaching out to people in Christ and helping to build up those who then believed in Christ?

²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

What was Paul going for? He was going for Christlikeness in the lives of as many people as possible. It was not enough for Paul just to bring people to a place of decision. He was not content simply with professions of faith in Christ, but he wanted to see maturity and completion of Christlikeness in their lives.

How wonderful that Paul understood this to be something possible. When he had people in view like Jews and Gentiles, Paul was one stubborn, hard-hearted, Pharisee. There was a time when Paul called himself a Pharisee of Pharisees, aka, Separatist of Separatists! His view toward people like us Californians would have been to stay away from us. He was a Separatist.

This is how the Pharisees were, but then that hard-hearted man was so totally transformed and given such a Christlike love for the nations, that Paul was saying, "If that is what the power of God's Word can do in a Jew like me, that's what He could do in others as well." He saw transformation in the Gentiles in Colossae, even Scythians.

Even among those brutal people, people could be totally transformed into Christlikeness. That was the purpose Paul was aiming for, not only to see them confessing their sins and coming to Christ for forgiveness, but also growing and being formed and fashioned in the image of Jesus Christ.

That was the end—Christlikeness and maturity in Christ. What was the means by which Paul was going to carry it out in the ministry of the Word?

²⁸Him we proclaim

Paul was going to be proclaiming the truths of the One that he wanted to see people grow into the likeness of. His goal was to see people forgiven by the blood of Christ, then grow in the way of Christ by hearing lots about Christ. Him we proclaim!

That ministry involved some warning. Informing people in no uncertain terms that a part from Christ, there is eternal judgment for sin. There are still devastating effects of sin in this world. We need Jesus' grace all throughout this life. And in teaching. Teaching about the glories of His work and of His person and of His character. So Paul was proclaiming Christ in order to produce Christlikeness.

Many of us might read this and say, “Well, Pastor Jeff, that is a really cool verse for a man like you, proclaiming Christ; for someone who is in pastoral ministry, but as far as I am concerned, no, the time is not going to come when I’m out on the street corner proclaiming Christ. It is very unlikely that I am even going to be standing up in a pulpit or anything like that.”

There was time when I sat in the front pews over there watching Pastor Paul preach and literally, I remember a couple of occasions asking myself how he does it, and saying that I would never, ever do that. True story and look what happened!

But whether or not you are ever called to a ministry of public proclamation, every single follower of Jesus Christ is called to the ministry of the Word in fellowship and discipleship with other Christians. We are all to have the Word of God living in us that we might help others grow in Christ.

One of my favorite verses in Colossians is very similar to what we just read. This is a word that is given to the entire body of Christ and is found in Colossians Chapter 3 and Verse 16:

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you (that is a plural you) richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Teaching and admonishing are the same Greek terms that are in Colossians 1:28. Here the same Greek term for warning is now translated admonishing. It is the same thing.

This is the ministry of the many. While there are a whole diversity of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ, some with service, some with administration, some with helping, some with mercy,

there is a common denominator and that is that when the Holy Spirit is gripping our lives and we are walking in obedience to the power that He brings to us, we will all be students of the Word of God, not only for the sake of our own personal enrichment but so that we might help others grow in Christ. That is the vision.. We need to appreciate the purpose that God can use little old us to help somebody else grow in the ways of Christlikeness. Isn't that awesome?

This is what we are called to. O pray that the Lord will turn your heart to this because tendencies toward self-comfort will help us to live in our own private little world. We need to say, "God, let Your Word dwell in me richly, so that I can help others grow in Christ."

The Word of Christ dwelling in you richly does not just happen automatically. Guess what? It involves contemplation of the Word, meditation on the Word, hearing the Word, reading the Word, studying the Word., and reading good doctrine about the Word. And Christ calls us to do this.

There is some effort that needs to be put forth in it. Paul used the language of toil., and the Greek word Agonizomai in the next verse. He was taking pains in his preparation for the ministry of the Word. That is the calling for all of us. That is what it will take.

I remember back in the early 20s, when Kristy and I were a couple years into our relationship. The Lord was giving me a new and increased love for the Bible, for the Word of God. I was sitting under some really good teaching. There was a Youth for Christ Bible Study that I went to with a bunch of rock-a-billy, tattooed, side burned type of folks.

The love of Jesus was so powerful in the midst of this Tuesday night young adult Bible study. The teacher's name was Dan, and his way of bringing the Word was registering with me. I remember that we were in Genesis, then the Gospel of John, and by the time we got to the Gospel of John, I was thinking that it's in me, but if I am going to be a godly husband someday, I need to do some devotionals with Kristy.

So I decided to do devotions with Kristy based on what we were hearing at the Bible study. One day we were hanging out at my house so I asked Kristy if she wanted to do a Bible study together. She said yes that she would love to do that.

I expected that the Holy Spirit on the spot was going to reveal to me all of the things that I was going to encourage her with. I read through a portion of the Gospel of John, and was expecting that I would edify with many profound insights, and I was drawing blanks! At that time it was revealed to me that investing the Word of the Lord in the lives of others involves prior preparation.

Paul would later tell Timothy, "Take pains in preaching and teaching in the public reading of Scripture." Paul was saying, "Exert yourself in these, because it takes some preparation." In the midst of the pool of preparation, once you have been in the Word and are learning things, the Holy Spirit has every ability on the spot to trigger things in you that are going to be good for the person you are talking to.

However, it takes preparation. Ask God to give you appreciation of the purpose that we together are to be a part of discipleship, one anothering of the Word; helping others to grow in the Lord by insights that the Spirit is giving you.

We do that at Home Fellowship Group. We do that during the 9:00am hour where people can share. Let's have more of that just with people meeting in coffee shops, reading good books together. Reading Scriptures together. This is what we are called to, but understand this is going to move into our leisure time. It might require less time on Netflix. It is going to take some effort on our part to prepare. Let's say, "Spirit, let Your Word dwell in me richly, that I might share the Word with others."

That brings us to the final point.

To endure the ministerial sufferings of Christ:

3. Let's experience the energy (1:29)

Paul was very much perceptive that there was another power that was at work in him. He was not doing this based on his own self-discipline, his own sense of fortitude and drive. He knew that mystery was at work in him. Christ was dwelling in him, and Christ was the One empowering him. Paul said:

²⁹For this I toil

To see people mature in Christ through the ministry of the Word.

²⁹For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Paul knew that there was somebody else seeing him through.

In that statement, I think there is very profound encouragement for so many people here in our church. I praise God that there are some that have been coming that are newer to the faith, or maybe just getting reconnected to the church. That is awesome. Praise God for the power of Christ at work in you.

As we think about Paul, he is speaking as man who was probably somewhere in his early to mid-60s when he was writing this letter. He had now been in Gospel ministry for at least thirty years. He had been studying the Old Testament and the Torah from his childhood. But now he had been serving Christ for decades.

In the midst of those decades, he was another Paul who had gone through the school of hard knocks, literally. Bruised and bloodied. He had been stoned. He had been shipwrecked. He had been slandered. He had been through so much. He was writing this very letter under house arrest.

Then it all went back to a moment in Jerusalem when some of the Jews falsely accused him of bringing Gentiles into the inner precincts of the temple. There was a bunch of baloney, where Paul was slandered and that led to where he is now several years into his incarceration.

Having had this issue many years under his belt, along with many difficult years, Paul could have been a man who was just feeling totally flattened and flamed out. The fact of the matter is that Paul knew how that felt. You can read what he said in 11 Corinthians Chapter 1, where it says that the difficulty was so much that there were times when he even despaired of life itself.

So Paul got it. Yet, here he was a man who had been studying the Word of God relentlessly for decades, experiencing difficulty and still Christ was just so fresh firing within him. Christ was still triggering things in Him. If Christ was triggering these things in him, he can be triggering this kind of renewed passion and zeal in us through the decades of life that we have walking with Him on this earth in this mission that He calls us to until we go into the glory of His kingdom.

So we go the Lord and, say, “Lord, will you fill me with this power that was being manifested in the life of Paul, that I might remain with holy zeal for Your truth and for Your Word, even to the point that I will be willing to take some shots if it means helping others know and grow in Christ?” Will you pray that way? Will you ask Jesus to do these things for you?

Bethel Grace, some of you have been through and are going through so many painful experiences. As I have been contemplating these things this week, a great many faces have come to mind who are going through difficult, difficult things. Exhausting things and draining things and painful things.

Many of those things are just under the curse that we are living in the midst of bodily decline; in the midst of cancer; in the midst of bodily afflictions. Perhaps it is even more painful when it is being experienced in the lives of people that you love. That can just wear you down.

In addition to that, you know what it is to be questioned for your faith; maligned for your faith. You share Jesus with people and they think that there is some kind of odd thing going on with you. Some in Bethel Grace have been accused of brainwashing by family members. These kind of things can hurt and they can wear you down.

Brothers and sisters, here is a voice that is speaking through the ages from the First Century to the Twenty-First Century. That voice carried by the Spirit of God into your life is that Jesus brings His power and His grace to the people that He indwells.

As we finish and think about this call to endure suffering for the cause of Christ, I just want you to take to heart that Jesus knows you inside and out. He is inside of you. He knows you. Jesus is omnipotent and He has power for your life.

Jesus has love that simply cannot be measured or searched out, and Jesus loves you in ways that you still don't even realize. He is our Indwelling Christ. He is our Lord. He is our Savior. He is our Sustainer and it is His power and His grace resting in us and working through us that is

going to help us to lead forth in wonderful ministry that is glorious and that has ramifications that echo forth into eternity.

Let's close in a word of prayer.