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## KNOW AND GROW IN CHRIST

Colossians 1:27

I'm going to talk today about the topic "Know and Grow in Christ." What does it mean to know and grow in Christ? Our text will be Colossians 1, verse 27, but I want to read the context of that verse, so let's begin in verse 24 of Colossians 1.

*Now 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, of 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, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To 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. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

Today I want to invite you to be brutally honest in answering a simple question: **Do you have a compelling vision for life, a compelling vision for life that inspires you and informs and directs the course of your life?** Our goal today, January 1, 2017, is to help you answer that question, and for us as a church to answer that question, to clarify our vision as a church going forward. I believe that the answer that's provided from this text and what we'll explore over the next few weeks, talking about vision and mission, will have direct application to your personal life, your personal vision and mission for life.

I was just scanning the congregation today, trying to figure out if it was easier to get up and get here on Christmas Morning or New Year's Day. I'm not sure which crowd wins, but I have found it rather humorous. If you were here on Christmas Day, you heard me confess that I ate ice cream at 9 in the morning on Christmas Day, and that I thought that was appropriate for Christmas, that it was a gesture of celebrating God's grace. Since then, I've heard that you went crazy celebrating God's grace, maybe in some ways that were not so sanctified on Christmas Day. I got blamed for all sorts of activities. "Well, Brian ate ice cream, so we might as well..."

I want to just clarify here and tell you that eating ice cream whenever you want to is an insufficient vision for life. It will not go well for you in the long run. But it is important. If I could perhaps illustrate it in this way -- if I spend time today talking to you about what you should do or what you shouldn't do, I think if you lack a vision for life, it will be difficult for you.

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When I talk to my sons or my daughter about living a life that honors God, and I talk about the specifics of what that looks like, it lacks motivational power if they don't have a vision for life. If I talk about avoiding sexual sin, but it's never in the context of living a glorious life in Jesus Christ, it's largely ineffective. Doing what's right because it's right is good, but it only carries us so far. We need vision and the scripture provides that for us. **Our goal in this first six or eight weeks of 2017 is to really unpack what our vision is as a local church and how that fits into your own life.**

We are going to use Colossians 1 as a place to do that. Paul did not start the church at Colossae, yet he had a unique relationship with this church. He preached in Ephesus, which was about 80 miles away, and a guy got saved named Epaphras. Epaphras went back to Colossae, 80 miles away, and just started sharing what he had heard, and a church got started. He and Philemon played critical roles in the founding and establishing of this church.

Eventually, Paul ends up in prison and the church now has a challenge. Epaphras goes to Rome and says, "Paul, listen – I've got great news for you. The gospel you preached, the message you preached -- it's powerful. There's a church! Wonderful things are happening, but there's something that's very dangerous. Someone has come in with a false teaching. They have taught that the physical world, the material world is evil -- that matter itself is evil. That means Jesus couldn't have had a physical body or really been physical, and he certainly didn't create everything.

It was a very complicated teaching, but basically it started off with God at the top, then there were various levels of angels and created beings, and the further they got away from God, the less pure they were in spirit and the more material. This led to a kind of thinking of working your way up these various levels and various mediators that get you to God. It's a terrible, terrible teaching.

So now in prison, Paul writes Colossians -- to a church, to a place he's never been, to correct that false teaching. But here's what he does. He doesn't just lay out the teaching as I've done and say, "Hey, I hear this is being taught. This is what I hear about all this." Instead, he follows the normal form of a letter in his day and begins to tell them what he is thankful for and what he's praying for. And through that format, he lays in a foundation for the Christian life.

Let me say that again because it's very important. Colossians 1 is one of those great places in the bible that you can go to that provide for you an overview of the Christian life. There are a number of places like that. The entire book of Romans provides a summary or an overview. The entire book of 1 John does the same. Philippians 3 would be a chapter of scripture that you could go to that gives you a summary or a foundation, the end of Titus 2, the beginning of Titus 3, and Ephesians 1 and 2. There are various places that you can go to in scripture that give you a concise one or two verses: Romans 1:16-17, or a few paragraphs: Romans 3:21-31, or a whole chapter, or a whole book. Colossians 1 is one of those places. Are you with me? Or were you up too late last night? Just confess your sin right now. You thought I was going to go easy on you today – not at all.

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**So Colossians 1 gives us an overview of the Christian life, and in verse 27 I think you have something very close to a vision statement for the Apostle Paul. Here's the verse: "To 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."**

In the paragraph we read when we began, here's what Paul says. He says, "Listen, I'm a steward. God has given me a treasure to watch over, to protect, to manage, and that treasure is a message. He calls it a mystery. It's a mystery, not in the sense that only the very clever can figure out. It's a mystery in the sense that it was hidden until Jesus came and made it clear. That message is basically the last part of this verse: **Christ in you is the hope of glory. That's Paul's vision.**

**He is acknowledging to you and me that you were made for glory. You were created to know the glory of God, to experience God's glory, to live in God's glory, to reflect God's glory, but we have a problem.** Instead of doing that, we traded God's glory for lesser glories. We traded uncreated, undiminished glory for created glory. So we are drawn to people who are exceptional, to things that are exceptional. We see a great athlete, or an artist, or beauty, or entertainment, or we see money, or achievement, or intellect, or virtue – various lesser glories we have given ourselves to instead of living for, thanking, and worshipping the glory of God.

The result of that is that there has been a lot of pain, a lot of hurt, a lot of corruption. Death entered into our reality and as a result we live with the corruption of sin because we have rebelled against God and are not living for his glory. We experience it in relationships. We experience it physically. We experience it emotionally. **And Paul comes with a message saying, "Jesus restores us to that former glory, the glory that is ours in God." That's his vision statement.**

Now, how does he do that? What is his mission? This is the Why. What is the What? **Paul's mission, the very next verse is, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." Paul is saying, "This is what I live for. I live for the glory of Christ. That's my vision. It inspires me. But what do I do day in and day out? I'm trying to make every person mature in Jesus Christ. I'm helping them to know and grow in Christ. That's my mission.** That's 'boots on the ground' as we say, what I'm living my life doing."

The Apostle Paul lays this out in Chapter One of Colossians, and it provokes a question for us: **If it's all about Jesus and knowing him and growing in him, what does that look like? Specifically, what does it mean to know Christ and to grow in him?** I want to break that down into four aspects taken right from the text of Colossians 1. Let's go right to #1 in verses 3 through 8. #1 is this: It means Faith.

**I. Faith, verses 3 through 8.**

It means to know and grow in your faith in Jesus Christ. If you look at verses 3-6, Paul writes:

*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth...*

What is Paul saying? He is saying, “I am so grateful for your faith. You heard the message. You heard the gospel. You understood the truth and you believed it. You embraced it. To know and grow in Christ is to know and grow in your trust in Jesus, your faith.” So he thanks God for their faith and that they have heard the gospel, they have heard the good news.

Notice that he speaks of this message in organic terms. It’s bearing fruit. It’s increasing in your life. It’s alive. There is a power in the truth of Jesus Christ and about Jesus Christ that is bearing fruit in your life. So, #1 is Faith.

## II. Obedience, verses 9-14.

To know and grow in Christ is to know and grow in your obedience. Verses 9 and 10:

*And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God...*

Notice the language that parallels knowing and growing. He talks about increasing in the knowledge of God. Our focus specifically here in these verses is obedience – living a life worthy of the Lord. When we follow Jesus, we embrace the Lord in faith and trust in him. We believe his word. There is a power in that that transforms us, and as we live by that power we commit ourselves to obeying the Lord.

Now he repeats this idea that we are strengthened by the word of God. Verse 11: “...being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy...” Now, let me ask you: Are you a Christian? If so, are you knowing and growing in your faith and in your obedience to Christ? Is your life on a daily basis less and less characterized by a lack of faith, fear, anxiety, and worry? Is it less and less characterized by patterns of sin and disobedience and rebellion against God? And is it more and more characterized by a deep, abiding trust in Jesus that is bringing transformation to your very character? Are you knowing and growing in your faith and in your obedience to the Lord? **Paul’s passion is that you would have a vision for the glory of God that is so great that you are giving yourself to maturing in Christ, growing in faith, growing in obedience.**

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What else does it mean to know and grow in Christ? It means Relationship.

**III. Relationship, verses 15 to 23.**

It means knowing and growing in your relationship, your knowledge of Jesus, your experience of Jesus. This is actually verses 15 to 23, but let me just jump into verse 21: “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled...” That’s the idea. We were alienated from God. We were under God’s judgment, but Jesus has offered himself as a sacrifice so that we are reconciled to God. In fact, in these two paragraphs (verses 15 to 23) Paul says that this is in you, in the Church, and in the world. He talks about Jesus’ reign in these three spheres.

Do you remember the false teaching that he’s combatting? It was that Jesus couldn’t have created everything, that there are these levels. You see, he’s trying to come back and say, “No, no, no, no, no. Listen, Jesus is everything. Jesus is sufficient for all that you need. He is to be first. He is to be first in you and in the Church and in the world -- Jesus Christ is central -- all having to do with your relationship with Jesus Christ. It has been made possible because Jesus has given himself to reconcile you to the Father.

So we have Faith, Obedience, Relationship, and #4 – very importantly, it’s one that we often don’t associate with what it means to know and grow in Christ – it is to help others to know and grow in Christ.

**IV. Help others to know and grow in Christ, verses 24 to 29.**

This is the paragraph that we started with and we’ve already read this morning. Paul makes an interesting statement in verse 24. It’s really theologically a very troubling statement for us. He says, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings...” That’s probably a statement you don’t tend to make. “I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions,” or Christ’s sufferings. We immediately have to ask the question: Well, what is missing in the suffering of Jesus? Because we know from scripture that the bible teaches that Jesus’ suffering was complete, that he provided for our salvation, that there is nothing missing or lacking.

At face value we would look at this statement and say, “Wow, this doesn’t fit with the teaching of the rest of scripture. But Paul explains himself in this paragraph. His suffering is providing the one thing that is missing in their lives. What is that one thing? They needed someone to come to them and declare the message. They needed someone to come and make Christ known to them. In order to do that, Paul suffered. He not only travelled in a day when it was extremely difficult to travel -- we know from his own biographical material that he suffered shipwrecks -- but he also suffered tremendous persecution and affliction. He sacrificed tremendously to provide the one thing that was lacking in their lives so that they could hear the message.

I want to speak to Christians for just a minute. **If you are here and you are a follower of Jesus Christ, part of what it means to know and grow in Christ is that you are sacrificing in your own life to make him known to others.** In our day, where we live, perhaps that suffering looks different than what Paul experienced. Maybe the rejection that we might experience doesn't involve systemized or physical oppression in the way that Paul experienced it. But we understand there is still something that's lacking. People need to hear this message and it will require us to sacrifice in order to make it known.

**So, God made you for his glory. Christ is restoring you to that. Daily, that looks like you knowing and growing in Jesus, knowing and growing in your faith, obedience, relationship, and helping others to know and grow in Christ.** That's the biblical background. That's the summary of Colossians 1.

**In our last few minutes let me try to explain it in terms of our church vision. We are talking about knowing and growing in Christ. The vision statement is this: Christ is the hope of glory in you and in the Church and in the world. That answers the Why question, why we do everything we do. It is because Jesus Christ is the hope of glory.** Moving forward, the directing scripture, Colossians 1:27 -- it's what we've read today, especially that last phrase: "To 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."

Just so you don't have any confusion about this particular verse, part of what was so remarkable for Paul, this Jewish rabbi, is that this message is for the Gentiles. It's for the nations. It's not just for the Jewish people. Christ is the hope of glory in you and in the Church and in the world. That brings us to our mission statement. What is it we are doing?

**Riverside exists to help people know and grow in Christ.** That's what we do daily in terms of our mission.

We really haven't answered the most difficult question for you, which I think will be the most helpful: **How do I do that in daily life?** You have told me, Brian, according to Colossians 1, that knowing and growing in Christ means knowing and growing in my faith, knowing and growing in my obedience, my relationship with Jesus, and helping others know and grow -- those four things. I see that in the text. It's clearly biblical, and we will look at those same four things in the gospel of Matthew next week. It's all throughout the bible.

But I want to suggest to you that many times Christians just look at that and say, "I know that's true. I know it's true from the bible, but I don't know how to do it. I have an idea of the things that are Christian things, but what is the strategy for doing that?" And I'm so glad you've asked. Here it is in four words: **Gather, Connect, Serve, Grow** -- these four commitments. Let me talk about what each one means, answering the question of how we live out our mission and fulfill our vision.

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**1. Gather.**

That's what we are doing right here. Meeting on Sunday morning is a prime time for us to gather. This is where faith is really built as the word of God is proclaimed. God's word goes forth in power. It's organic. It's alive. It creates faith. It encourages us. We hear the gospel message taught in various ways applied to life and faith comes as a result. Faith comes when we worship the Lord, when our worship team leads us. Today powerful confessions were made about what we believe. And as we confess, "I believe in God the Father, I believe in the resurrection," faith is rising in our hearts as we exalt the Lord and worship the Lord. And as we hear the word of God taught, even after staying up all night, faith increases.

Listen, guys -- understand that if you don't make this connection between the How and the What and you wake up on Sunday morning, there is a lot competing for this time slot in your life, isn't there? But when you understand that this is vital to the mission, that this is vital to the vision that God has given you, it begins to change. Before we get to the next point, let me say that this is also how you help others know and grow. You bring them. You bring them here so that faith can be birthed in their heart. So, #1 is Gather.

**2. Connect.**

We connect relationally. We connect in small groups. If I could say this, I want you to think beyond a program. We have home groups. We have small groups. We have Wednesday night classes. All of those are ways for you to connect to other people relationally. But I'm not so interested at this moment in you just getting into a program. I want to say to you that I truly believe that you cannot know and grow in Christ without all of these four elements being built in your life. One of those is you've got to connect to other people relationally. That's where obedience really begins to take off. That's where you work with others in opening your life and letting them look in and share their observations. "Huh?!" Right?

We have fun with Mom in the car when we're all driving, because there are these moments somehow where my driving scares her, and she communicates that with a gasp. Then we like to imitate that gasp. All of us but one person like to imitate that gasp. Maybe that's what we feel when we get together and begin to open our lives to other people. What will people really think if they really know some of what's going on in my life? I just want to tell you it's so critical to the process of growth -- that encouragement, help, prayer for one another, honest sharing, forgiving, growing together.

That may look like you joining a home group. That may look like you going to a Wednesday night class. But it may be a man getting with three other men, reading a book at Starbucks at 7:00 on Monday morning. Or it may be couples getting together reading a book, or studying the Bible, or praying together, or sharing what Christ is doing in their lives. It doesn't

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have to be formalized, though the church is working to provide certain contexts for you to connect relationally. Friends, it's not most of all about a program. It's about genuinely connecting relationally.

### 3. Serve generously.

We are talking here about giving your time, talents, and treasure to help others know and grow in Christ, to show the mercy of God and to proclaim the message, to build the Church and to help others that are in need. This particular aspect of what it means to know and grow in Christ has sometimes been abused. People have come to church who didn't know Jesus (I hope that hasn't happened here, at least a lot), but they have come and they've felt like, "Man, all the church cares about is money." There have been times when that message has not gone out in a healthy way. But if I'm your pastor and a part of the pastoral team that cares for your soul, I cannot help you know and grow in Christ if I'm not calling you to turn outward and to serve God with your time, talents, and treasure. It is impossible for you to have spiritual health according to the scripture if that doesn't happen. It's just a key component. So you and I have to get past the fact that that's been manipulated or coerced or abused to see there is still vital biblical truth in this message. Then the last:

### 4. Grow spiritually.

Here's what we mean. **We are looking for a specific commitment: Daily time in prayer and God's word that flows over and defines your daily walk with the Lord. Learning to commune with God on a daily basis, you with the Lord, is critical to you knowing and growing in Christ.**

So: Gathering together (I feel like I'm preaching to the choir -- January 1 you got here -- amazing!), Connecting relationally, Serving generously, Growing in terms of our personal communion with the Lord.

Let me illustrate for you how these interconnect. If you are spending time with the Lord, and God is speaking to you from the scripture, and you are opening your heart before the Lord in prayer, then when you begin to connect relationally, there is something of Christ in you so that Christ in you, Christ in the Church, Christ in the world begins to happen.

But if there is not a growing commitment in these four areas, and you don't have the grace to spend time with God, and you're not working and trying to overcome the difficulties that are involved in that, then when you connect relationally it may be a good time, it may be interesting, it may be stimulating, but it probably won't be Christ, which is the glory that we really hunger for and need.

Please allow me here... I'm trying to illustrate this. I don't want to put this legalism on you. But we are going to talk over the next five or six weeks about how to do these four things. We are going to spend some time talking about, "How do I spend time with God and commune with God in my own personal life? And how does the rhythm of what I establish

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there in my daily time with God flow over into a rhythm for my walk with God? Because as I do that, that helps me connect relationally, commit to gathering in the larger setting, and to open my life to serve others.”

Just one or two more little connections, then we'll be done for this morning. I'm trying to illustrate how all four aspects parallel with Faith, Obedience, Relationship, Helping others -- Gather, Connect, Serve, Grow.

If you have not been envisioned biblically by the joy of serving, then when you go to connect with people relationally it won't work, because you will have a bit of a taker's mentality and you'll be very guarded. And if you begin to experience really good relationship, you'll be jealous to keep others out, and that will kill it. But if the value and the practice of serving others gets in, it will define the way you do relationship. So, if Adam and I are together and Caleb wants to join us... Sorry, brother. This is only for good-looking guys, I'm sorry -- young, vibrant, good-looking guys.

Yes, there may be times when the group is “closed” for a specific purpose for a specific amount of time to deal with something that's really difficult, but on the whole, the value is that it's open. And the more unlike me you are, the more I want you, the more I need you. That's what Jesus said. He said that when you invite someone to dinner, don't invite the person who has something to offer you. Invite the person that can't repay you. Invite the person you would never think about.

Now, if I invite you to be in my group, that doesn't mean I think you have nothing to offer me, but you get the principle, right? Okay, I get it. It's New Year's. We are jumping in and we are doing it for a reason. I am saying to you that you belong to Jesus, and if you're not growing, you are stagnant and you are dying. That is not God's purpose for you and it is not glorious.

**Some of you have known the Lord 30 or 40 years and God is saying, “Listen, here is a glorious invitation for you to be involved in knowing and growing in Christ and helping others to know and grow in Christ.”** I am suggesting to you -- I am doing more than suggesting, I am proclaiming -- in Paul's language, **I am warning and exhorting and teaching with all the wisdom I have to say, “Give your life to this cause. Give your life to Christ.”** Amen?

Aren't you glad there was this false teaching in Colossae? Isn't it amazing how God can take something so terrible and say, “You know what? Through the ages, my Church is going to be tempted to take Christ for granted. They are going to gather and they are going to do all kinds of religious activity, but Jesus won't be the main thing they talk about. He won't define their experience. They will lose knowing what it means to know and grow in him. So I'm going to allow this abuse so I can bring a very clear and strong correction, and Colossians 1 will bring life to the Church for the ages and provide vision for us.” Amen? Let's pray.

**Special Messages – Know and Grow in Christ**

Colossians 1:27 | Sunday, January 1, 2017 | By Brian Brookins

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