

Colossians #4 - 4 Musts For Christian Maturity

- Howdy, Pastor Mark Driscoll here at The Trinity Church in Scottsdale, Arizona. Really excited to provide for you the series of sermons based on the Book of Colossians. It's an amazing book of The New Testament, where the Apostle Paul is writing from prison to a newly planted church. And we took a few months here at The Trinity Church to go verse by verse through this book of the Bible. I've had the honor of preaching and teaching perhaps a few dozen books of the Bible in my career. And this is the first time I've ever been through Colossians. And I'm really excited that you can join me. So this fall, Grace and I will celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary, and in the early years of our marriage, meaning the first 20 years, we had this ongoing disagreement and we would react differently to circumstances. And I know what you're thinking. It must've been Grace's fault. Of course, but no need to camp on that point. Moving right along. We would have this disagreement because a hard time would come, suffering, trial, difficulty, tough season, and Grace would be more joyful and optimistic and hopeful. And she would say like, well, look at what God's doing or we're gonna be okay, or God's gonna use this, or He's gonna show up or He's gonna take care of us. And I would say, no, He's not. I was more thinking like Puddleglum and Eeyore were like good disciplers for me, everything's just bad and gonna get worse. And 'cause Grace had this philosophy that was different than mine when it came to suffering, temptations, trials. We would go through the exact same experience and we would respond very differently. And it led to some difficulty in our relationship. And then it dawned on me some years later, I was riding in a vehicle with an older pastor, he's a well-known evangelical leader. And he said, you know, he said, when I was young, I used to think that life had good seasons and bad seasons, and the key is to get through the bad season so you can get to the good season. And that's exactly how I thought. And he said, and then I realized that was wrong. I was like, well, do tell Yoda, what option is there? 'Cause my arguments with Grace were always, this is a bad, hard season, we're just, it's gonna be awful. So just furrow your brow, grind through it, and then when it's over, there'll be a good season. Hey, how many of you thought like this? And there's a bad season and then there's a different bad season. And then there's like a creatively new different bad season. And then there's a really bad season. And you're like, I never got to the good season. And he said, I used to think that life was good season, bad season, good season, bad season. And now I see it more like train tracks, that in every season of life there's good and bad happening at the exact same time. That there's blessing and suffering. That there's provision and lack, that there is rejoicing and there is weeping. And he said, all of these things are happening at the exact same time consistently throughout the course of life. And I thought, he's right, I'm wrong. Grace is right, I'm wrong. I have been thinking that there is good, then bad. It's always that there is good and bad. And those of you who are more optimistic, you'd be like, look at all that God is doing. Those of you who are pessimistic, look at all that is wrong or all the ways that we're suffering or hurting. And God wants us to be Christian, not just optimist or pessimist. He wants us to use one eye to focus on each track and to see, okay, what is God's blessing and provision in this season? Where are my suffering and hurting in this season? What is God providing? What am I still needing? And then as we understand that, we can make sense of our suffering. We can make

sense of every occurrence of suffering in our life. Well, today we're gonna look at the issue of suffering. If you're new, we like to go through books of the Bible. We're in a book of the Bible called Colossians, and the writer is a man named Paul, and he himself is in a season of suffering. Season of suffering. And he is a man who's experienced much suffering. He's been beaten. They've ripped the flesh off his back with a flogging. He has been in and out of jail, not for doing the wrong thing, but for doing the right thing. He's in prison when he writes this. Family and friends would've abandoned him because of his commitments. There's a mob that follows him from town to town because he starts riots. Here's a man who was shipwrecked on the sea and had to swim for his life. He's been homeless. He slept out in the cold. He's been absolutely exhausted and tired. And now he finds himself in jail. And since he has a little free time, he writes a letter to some people in a brand new church like ours in a town called Colossae. And he gives them four musts for Christian maturity. The first is you use your suffering to become like Jesus. So we'll start in Colossians 1:24. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings." Hey, first of all, that sounds awkward, amen? Can we just be honest? So we're like, oh, praise the Lord, I rejoice in my sufferings. If you do that, you might just be weird. Okay, you might not be holy, you might be weird. Some of the weirdest Christians I met, when bad things happen for no reason, they praise God. I never understood that. When I first got saved, I would meet joyful Christians. And I was like, fakers. Faker, faker, faker, faker, faker. Right, faker. And there are those Christians, right, they're like Ned Flanders disciples. They're like, oh, I got hit by a car, and I praise God, yay, 'cause it wasn't a truck. I'll look at the bright side. You're like, what the, what is wrong with you? You should not be so happy. There's something profoundly wrong with you. Okay, he rejoices in his sufferings. How many of you don't rejoice in your sufferings? How many of you, when you listen to music, people that are suffering, the songs that they write tend not to be poppy dance tunes. Have you noticed that? Like most country music, it's all about the pain and the struggle, and the song is never like a poppy dance tune. I think that certain young teenage female artists get boyfriends and dump them just to have material for their next album. That's my personal belief. I need a little pain and angst so that I have something to write about and it's never joyful. What's interesting here, Paul says he is suffering. So he's not denying his suffering. He's not saying it's all great, everything's fine. He's saying I am suffering, and I'm rejoicing. We're gonna unpack how that's even possible without denying reality or being a total faker and pretender. "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." There's a lot here. Let me first take a complicated, sometimes contentious issue and deal with it and set it off to the side. And what happens is because we're going through a book of the Bible, as you walk through and work through a book of the Bible, we tend to hit things that we may have otherwise not chosen. Amen? You're like, I wouldn't have ever really studied that, but there it is, so we're gonna pull the car over and take a look at it. This verse here is very debated. There are entire books written on it. And what he says is he's suffering. "And in my flesh I am filling up "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." Now, what it sounds like is Jesus didn't finish the job so I'm here to finish it. That's kind of what it sounds like, right? True or false? Like it kind of sounds like that. Is that what it means? There's a whole debate here. Well, I'll tell you what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that Jesus didn't finish the work of salvation and that we are not participating in finishing the work of salvation. When Jesus died on the cross, in our place for our sins, as our substitute and our savior through His

suffering, He said, "Father, forgive them." And then He said, "It is finished." So all of the work of forgiveness and salvation is completed at the cross of Jesus. He died in our place for our sins. There's nothing that we contribute to it. There's nothing we add to it. We just receive His finished work. We don't contribute to His work for our salvation. That being said, this verse is not entirely totally clear. What do we do with those? We could just read fast and pretend it's not there. I was tempted to do so. We can stop and wrestle with it a bit. The first thing I would say is we take those parts of the Bible that are less clear and we interpret them in light of those parts of the Bible that are more clear. So for example, I've got five kids I love with all my heart. I tell 'em I love 'em all the time. I kiss 'em on the head and I adore 'em. And if you ever overheard a conversation and I said to one of the kids something that sounded like I didn't love them. Maybe I miscommunicated, or maybe you misheard, I would hope you would say, well, I'm gonna interpret that less clear communication in light of all of these years of clear communication. So it is with the Bible. What false teachers and cult leaders do, they'll take the less clear portions of Scripture and build whole doctrines on them, rather than interpreting them in light of the more clear sections of Scripture. The Scripture is clear that Jesus plus anything ruins everything. That's what the Bible is very clear about. Jesus plus circumcision, Jesus plus baptism, Jesus plus tithing, Jesus plus speaking in tongues, Jesus plus suffering ruins everything because it's just Jesus who achieves our salvation. That's the clear teaching of the Bible. So then what do we do though with a text like this? You say, well, it's a little clear. And some of you would ask, Pastor Mark, what does it mean? Here's my answer. I don't know. I know you were expecting more. I hate to disappoint you. I don't know. I read a lot of commentators. I've got a big library, 5,000 books on the shelf, 30, 40,000 books or something in my laptop. I checked a bunch of 'em and here's what they all said, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I don't know. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Okay? Now, the blah, blah, blah, blah, blah is different, but it's all just blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. That's what it is. Because there's not clarity. So let's deal with this for a moment. How many of you ever read the Bible and had this response? Huh? Have you ever done that? Huh? What, huh? Let me say that that's a normal part of the Christian life. Don't feel bad about it. Don't think, well, done reading the Bible, I don't understand it. There's a guy who read Paul. The author here is Paul. There's a guy who read Paul and said, huh? His name was Peter. Okay? Peter writes books of the Bible. And when he reads other books of the Bible, he's like, huh? He doesn't fully understand it. You would say, well, what was he not well-trained? He went to the University of Jesus Christ for three years. He got a very good education. And he writes books of the Bible. Here's what he says about Paul. 2 Peter 3:15-16, I'll just read it to ya. He says, "Paul wrote to you, "according to the wisdom given him, "as he does in all his letters. "There are some things in them that are hard to understand." Peter says, if you've ever read Paul and went, huh? What? Peter says, I do that when I read Paul. So don't feel bad. You're alongside of the leader of Jesus's disciples and an author of a few books of The New Testament. What Peter is saying is, Paul's really smart. Sometimes I don't understand. Have you ever had a really smart friend? And they said something and you're like, I have no idea what that means. But I'm gonna smile and nod my head to give the impression that I do understand. He says, "What's the ignorant and unstable twist "to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures." Here's what Peter is saying. The Bible is true. Sometimes I don't fully understand things that Paul says. Don't do like cult leaders and false teachers do and twist and malign and change what he is saying. Be

humble enough to receive what he's saying and understand that we don't always fully understand what we are reading. A couple of things I'll tell you about God's word. Number one, don't be shocked that you read it and don't agree with it. I get this all the time. People come to me like, I read the Bible and I disagree with it. What makes you think that the Bible was wrong? Why did you rush to that conclusion? Why did you, why would you think God wrote a book and he agrees with me on everything? Good job, God. You're very insightful. Right, I don't pick up the Bible assuming that God agrees with me on everything, amen? I don't go to school, I didn't go to college and be like, what, we disagree? Shocking. No, I assume that there will be disagreement. Number two, I am not shocked that God is smarter than me. Some of you are like, Mark, you're not very smart. None of us are surprised. I know, but there are things in the Bible you read and you go, I don't fully understand that. It says in Isaiah that God's ways are higher than our ways. And God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. I have a three pound fallen brain that went to public school. Hence there are some things that I don't understand and I'm not as smart as God. And I don't be troubled by the things that I don't understand. And then, and say, and I would say in addition, when it comes to the issue of suffering, it's not shocking to me that a section of the Bible talking about suffering is confusing. How many of you have found that suffering is confusing? It is, it's confusing. God, why did this happen? What is going on? What am I supposed to? What, what's the point in all of this suffering? When Jesus came down and met with Paul in Acts 9, it was their first one-on-one. Paul was a man who hated Christ and Christians. Jesus had already died, risen, ascended to heaven, and returned for a little meeting with Paul. This is where Paul became a Christian. There are two things in that conversation that I think are very much bearing on this section of God's word. I think it's in chapter nine, verse four. Jesus says, "Why do you persecute me?" Okay. What was happening is Paul was persecuting Christians and Jesus was in heaven. But the persecution of Christians on earth was felt by Jesus in heaven. What that means is when you suffer, Jesus feels it. How many of you love someone so much that when they're suffering, you're suffering. You ever experienced that? Jesus loves you so much that when you're suffering, He's suffering. The second thing Jesus says in Acts 9, I think it's around verse 16. He says that part of Paul's ministry will be to suffer for the name of Jesus. Whatever Paul is alluding to here. I think it is in reference to that conversation he had with the Lord Jesus, that when we suffer Jesus suffers, and part of a normative Christian life in ministry includes suffering for the name of Jesus. So much in our day is to avoid suffering. You cannot avoid all suffering. So what do you do when suffering comes? You receive it as a normative part of Christian life in ministry. We can go our whole life and learn little to nothing about suffering. They don't have a class on how to suffer well in high school. You can't go to college and get a minor in suffering, even though it becomes a major part of your life. As your pastor who deeply loves you, cares for you, I wanna help you suffer. And that's important because if I don't help you to suffer, I'm not very helpful. And I'm sorry for what you've been through. I'm sorry for what you're going through. I'm sorry for the fears that you have for what might be coming on the horizon. What I do know is that suffering came to Christ and that suffering comes to Christians. And when we are suffering, what happens first is we tend to be feeling, I think you get emotional. In addition, we need to be thinking, what am I gonna do with this season that I find myself in, these circumstances that I find myself in? So that being said, I wanna talk about suffering a little bit. And I've looked at most or all of the occasions of suffering

in the Bible. My job is to lead and feed, and I wanna help. And so we'll do a deep dive, kind of in the deep end of the pool for a minute, it's in your notes. So don't try and write it all down. You copious types. We love you. God bless you. It's already in your notes. But suffering is confusing because there are different kinds of suffering. As a result, there are different responses to suffering. I'll give them to you. There are 14 that I found in the Bible and I'm open to having others revealed. Number one, Adamic suffering. We live in a world where our first father, Adam sinned. As a result, sin and death have come into the world and things are broken and things decay and things die and things don't work. And that's not God picking on you personally. That's just part of being in a fallen world. Number two, there's demonic suffering. This is where Satan and demons, they attack you, they lie to you, they harm you, they oppress you. This is what the Bible refers to as spiritual warfare. Number three, there's victims suffering. This is where you didn't do anything, but someone did something that was wrong or evil to you. You got up and got in your car and went to work. And a drunk driver was texting and ran an intersection and plowed into you, and you're a victim. You didn't do anything. You're a victim. There's collective suffering. This is where you're part of a group of people and they are suffering together. This is what happens when a terrorist strike hits a nation, the whole nation goes into a period of mourning and processing. It's collective suffering. They're suffering by being part of a group. There's disciplinary suffering. This is where God like a loving parent knows that you're saying or doing things that are gonna harm you. And so there's a little discipline that's a corrective to get you out of harm's way and into a wiser and healthier place. He does that out of love for us. There's also persecution suffering. This is where you're suffering 'cause you love the Lord. And when you bring Jesus, there's opposition to Him, but it's poured out on you. I was talking to someone recently, they're a newer Christian, and they told their family I've become a Christian. Their family did not like that. So there's persecution. Families mocking them, gossiping behind their backs, making the holidays awkward, speaking ill of them, pejoratively, negatively. It's persecution. The only reason their family is being unkind to them is because they've met Jesus. There is also empathetic suffering. This is where you love someone so much that you share in their suffering. This is what the Bible means by weeping with those who weep. We've got five beautiful, healthy kids and Grace suffered miscarriage some years ago. And when grace suffered that miscarriage, she was suffering because she's losing a life of our unborn child. Our unborn child is suffering because they are in the process of dying in their mother's womb from a miscarriage. And the children are suffering because we love Grace and we love children and we'd welcome the next one into the family, we'd make the fab five into the super six. And I'm suffering because my wife is suffering and my children are suffering and our unborn child is suffering. That's empathetic suffering. Some of you have high empathy. You're highly compassionate sympathetic people. And when others are suffering, you participate in that hurt. There's testimonial suffering, where someone or some group of people is causing you harm. And God wants you to respond in such a way that it's a testimony and a witness. It's part of your ministry. I was talking to someone here at the church not long ago, they're a newer Christian. They got a job. And at this job, their coworkers figured out they were a Christian. So now they're harassing them. They're making fun of 'em, picking on 'em, goading 'em. What they're hoping is that the Christian will get angry and lash out, and then they can be like, ah-ha, see, you're all hypocrites. They said, I know what they're doing. And I'm just gonna love 'em, love 'em, love

'em. I'm not gonna blow up. 'Cause this is my testimony that God loves me and God loves them and God is gonna love them through me. It's a testimony. Providential suffering is when God is doing something much bigger than us and we're just a small part of it and in the middle of it, we don't really see it or understand it. There's a story in the Bible of a guy named Joseph, his brothers throw him in a hole, leave him for dead, sell him into slavery, horrible situation, tons of suffering. And in the end, it was all God's providential plan for Joseph to become a political leader that allows during a time of famine people to be fed, he literally saves lives. And in worshiping God, many people come to worship his God. So he becomes used of God for the salvation of bodies and souls. And he didn't know it in the middle. He's just suffering. But it's part of God's big providential plan of which he was a small part. But there's also mysterious suffering. Sometimes we just don't know. We don't know. The Bible says we see in part, we know in part. There are certain times you're suffering. You're like, did I do something? Did I not do something? Is demonic? What, what is this? And sometimes the answer is, I don't know. I don't know why this is happening. As your pastor who loves you, I want you to be okay on occasion saying, I don't know. I don't know why I'm suffering, or even in a section of Scripture, being able to say, I don't know. I'll study, do my homework, I'll pray, but I don't know. And it's okay to say, I don't know, because I do know the one who knows. My dear friend, you don't need to know. Sometimes you just need to know the one who knows. Number 12, sometimes there's punishment suffering. This is where you commit a crime and you pay a fine, you commit a crime, you go to jail. That's justice. Number 13, there is consequential suffering. This is reaping and sowing. The decisions we make have consequences. I was talking to somebody years ago and they eat horribly, like their whole diet ends in itos, Cheetos, Fritos, Doritos, taquitos. They're on the itos diet, right? And I'm, and I love 'em, they're a friend of mine. They're like, yeah, my health is not good. I feel like Satan is attacking me. No, this is not demonic suffering. This is self-inflicted injury. That's what this is. You need to eat something not cooked by a high school kid, handed to you in the car, after you ordered it from a clown. You need to just, you need to go find a vegetable and at least pray about consuming it. Start somewhere, baby steps. Okay. Consequential suffering. And then lastly, category 14, there is apocalyptic suffering. And this is that as we are approaching the second coming of Jesus, I don't know when it is, but I know we're getting closer. That when He returns, there will be a season of increased war, violence, evil, demonic attack, global conflict, apocalyptic, as we approached the end of the age and the second coming of Jesus. Here's what I want you to know. Suffering's complicated. Suffering's complicated. Sometimes it's all my fault. I caused my own suffering. Sometimes it's partly my fault. Sometimes it's not my fault at all. Hence, it's complicated. Now, let me say this. Paul is suffering and he's in prison for serving Jesus. And the suffering that he is experiencing is of multiple kinds simultaneously. So these are not mutually exclusive categories. You can be suffering multiple kinds of suffering in one circumstance, and there's many layers to it. But here is what we observe through Paul. He is honest about his suffering and he is sharing it with others. And he is through his own example, instructing them in this tremendously important principle. That principle, my friend is this, your suffering does not define you. How you respond to your suffering defines you. Tell you how this works. I've seen two people go through the exact same experience with completely different responses. This can be a husband and a wife, two siblings, friends, roommates, people that are experiencing the exact same suffering have

completely different responses to it. I've seen through a difficult circumstance, one person say that ruined my life, I'll never be the same again. My heart was broken. That's when I stopped walking with God, I've not been to church, picked up my Bible or prayed since. It ruined my life. In one counseling session, dealing with the exact same circumstances, I've had someone who was with them during that difficult season, say, you know, it's not what I wanted, but I praise God for it. It has taught me more about God and myself than any other experience of my life. In the middle of it, it was very hard. But looking back, I'm grateful for it. I wouldn't be the person I am today. I wouldn't have the attitude of gratitude that I do today. I would not have the depth of character, relationship with God that I have today, had I not gone through that experience. True or false? This happens all the time. Circumstances don't define who you are. Circumstances provide an opportunity for you to make a decision of who you're going to be in response to the circumstances. That's what Paul is doing. Paul doesn't write a letter and say, I love the Lord. And I just keep suffering. I have no wife. I have no kids. I'm homeless. I'm scarred. I'm in jail again. I'm hungry. If I get out of jail, the mob is gonna find me and beat me. My whole, here's my terrible tale. Paul's honest about his suffering. And he decides he's gonna use it and learn from it and grow from it. That's remarkable. So let's learn from his example. When you are suffering, there's one question that we tend to ask a lot that's not particularly helpful. Why? Anybody ever ask this question? Is it just me? Okay, it's just me. Thank you for participating in my session of therapy. The problem with the why question is it can be that we put God on trial. Okay? God, I'm in a hard season. I now need you to sit in the seat. Place your hand on the Bible, Jesus, do you swear the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, so help you, you? Okay, now I need to cross-examine you. Why did this happen? Why did you allow this? Why did I go through this? Why does this occur? Why didn't you stop it? If you knew, why didn't you prevent it? Okay. Just so you know, Jesus doesn't go on trial. In fact, He's the judge who holds the trial, and everyone will pass before His judgment seat to give an account. So we need to be careful when we ask the why question that we're not trying to sit in the God seat, and victims sometimes like to sit in the God seat. I love you. Let me be careful with this. Okay, let me be kind. I know you're hurting and suffering. But sometimes the victim will want a seat in the God seat and put God on trial. And I'm telling you that's not good for you. It won't help you. That's not where you belong. Better than the why question or a few other questions. All right, Jesus. How can I learn through my suffering more about you? That's a good question that God will answer. See, we have a God who suffered, His name is Jesus. That's where Hebrews says, "We do not have a high priest who is unable "to sympathize with us in our weakness, "for He has been tempted in every way as we are, "yet without sin." Jesus, you went through hard times. How did you do that without sinning? How did you not let your suffering turn you towards sinning? Jesus, you did it. I wanna learn how to do that. Can you teach me? Do you think Jesus would help you? Absolutely. That's a good question. What Lord Jesus can I learn about you through my suffering? Lord Jesus, here's another good question, the how question. Lord Jesus, how through my suffering can I become more like you? That's a good question. Jesus, you suffered for me. I'm suffering. How can I become more like you, have a character that reflects yours more accurately through what I'm suffering? Do you think Jesus would like to answer that prayer? Absolutely. How about this question? The who question. Jesus, who can I help that's suffering like me? Who's going through something similar to what I'm going through, and who could I help, who could I love,

who can I serve? Do you think Jesus would wanna answer that question? Yes. When we're suffering, when we're hurting, we're feeling a lot. I'm saying we also need to be thinking and we need to be seeking and we need to be asking not necessarily the why question. The why question will be answered in the kingdom of God when our faith becomes sight and we know as we're fully known. In the meantime, faith, trust that there will be an answer to the why question at the end, in the meantime, the better questions are, how can I learn about you? How can I become more like you? Who can I help and serve as I learn to become more like you? That's the example that Paul is giving us. There's an opportunity through our suffering to learn about Christ, to become like Christ, and to help others to grow deeper in relationship with Christ. Here's what I'm saying. Your hardship, your pain, your struggle, your strife, your toil, your tears, your fears. They've cost you a lot. They've cost you a lot. And I don't want you to waste such a precious investment. I want you to rather invest it in your well-being and the helping of others to the glory of God. Okay? And I just sense in the room, the Holy Spirit is speaking to some people about some very specific things, some pains from your past that you've not healed from and moved forward from. And you have said something like, well, time heals all wounds. No it doesn't, only Jesus heals wounds, my friend. Only the great physician does that kind of work at the level of the soul. Time doesn't heal anything. Time with Jesus, time with Jesus heals everything. Some of you, I sense in the Holy Spirit's presence with us right now, you need to go back before you go forward. There's something in your past, a hurt, wound, a burden, a disappointment, a brokenness that needs to be healed up. For some of you, it's something right now in the present. You're in it. This is a very difficult season for you. And this is a timely word from the word of God for you. God loves you. This word is for you. His word is for you. Some of you, you're living in fear and anxiety, because you're not in the suffering, but it's right on the horizon and you can see that it's coming. We are gonna get divorced. I think the doctor's gonna say it's cancer. That wayward child ain't coming home soon. My company's downsizing and my job is going to go away. I was really hoping we could work it out, but it's gonna be divorce. The doctor said there was hope, but they're dying. If God can't help us when our suffering occurs, then our God is not very helpful. And if the word of God can't speak into our suffering, then we are left without a word from God in the seasons where we need to most hear from God. One of the reasons I love teaching through books of the Bible is I believe in the providence of God, as we come to a point in Scripture, it will intersect beautifully with the need for your life in that moment. God loves you. This is a time that he's appointed to meet with you and to love you and to help you and to serve you. It's a great honor to be your pastor and open God's word. We don't start by rejoicing in our sufferings, but we get to the point where we can begin to rejoice in our sufferings if we think about it and bring it to Jesus. Must number two, focus on Jesus and others. Colossians 1:25-27, he says, "I became a minister," that's someone who serves Jesus, "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." When Paul uses the language of mystery, he's not talking about something that is unknown, but that was previously unknown and now has been made known. It's like a, it's behind a curtain, and then the curtain gets pulled away, and now it's seen. And the mystery was this. That God began working through a man

named Abraham. He circumcised himself and became the first Jew, before that, he was a Gentile. And that through Abraham would come a nation of people, the Jewish people, racially and spiritually Jewish. Through them would come a Jewish savior named Jesus Christ. And most of the people who worship God in The Old Testament were Jewish, with some exceptions, they were Gentiles, the non-Jews. Ruth was a Moabite, she's an example. Rahab is an example. When God's people left bondage and slavery in Egypt, some of the Egyptians came with them to worship their God. But if you converted to the worship of the God of the Bible, you would have to become Jewish. Now, most of us were not Jewish, we're the dirty Gentiles. Okay, that's a great punk band name, "The Dirty Gentiles." Okay, we're the dirty Gentiles. And so what the mystery is that Jesus comes and He makes a third race, not Jew or Gentile, but Christian, belonging to Jesus. And that third new race is comprised of Jews and Gentiles. Now what happens is Paul is a messenger of this mystery. The Jews hate that message 'cause they don't want the dirty Gentiles. And the dirty Gentiles hate this message 'cause they don't wanna worship a Jewish savior. So Paul is hated by both sides. That's his life. If he goes into the Jews and says, God loves you and the Gentiles. They're like, we hate the dirty Gentiles. Okay. And if he walks into a town and says, God loves you dirty Gentiles and the Jews. They'll be like, we're not worshiping a Jewish guy named Jesus. So he's hated and opposed on both sides. Here's the point. Sometimes you can say the right thing and do the right thing and still have opposition and persecution. Sometimes we suffer because we said or did that which was wrong. Sometimes we suffer because we said or did that which is right. So what he does here, as he is suffering, he talks about worshiping. So let's do a little case study. It's a little emotional in the room, I love ya. When you're suffering, there are two responses, the winners and the losers. Okay. So we'll ask you guys first. Do you guys, okay? You're all suffering. Do you wanna be the winners or the losers? You're Americans. You all wanna be winners? Okay. Okay. I hate to break it to you. You guys are the losers. Yeah. Not as enthusiastic, but yes. Okay. So what this means is hardship, trial, temptation, trouble, suffering comes. The winners, the winners say, I'm gonna beat it. I'm gonna, I'm gonna get over it. I'm gonna conquer it, right? I had a guy recently tell me, I'm gonna punch cancer in the mouth. Really? I was like, well, I didn't know cancer had a mouth. The winner mentality is I'm gonna rise up, you know, to quote that goofy pop song. If it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger. Right, so that's the winner mentality. Okay. Now, the loser mentality is I can't win. I'm gonna get cancer. They're gonna divorce me. My kids are not coming back to Christ. Right. So it's that other pop song. I'm a loser baby, so why don't ya--

- [Congregation Member] Kill me.

- Kill me, right? It's Beck, okay? Right? When suffering comes, is it possible to always be a winner? No. Can't always win. When suffering comes, is there any hope, help, or healing in being the loser? No. So what he gives us is a third category, not winner or loser, worshiper. Okay. Can you winners be worshipers? Yeah. Can you losers be worshipers? Yes. What we do is we worship and we leave the consequences in God's hand. Paul's in prison. He don't know if he's gonna get out, and if he does get out, he might go into prison again. So he's a winner and then a loser, which is not really a win, amen? He ran away from the mob. Oh, and there's another mob. I mean, this is his life. You can't always win, you won't always lose. But if you're a

child of God, you can always worship. And worship is where we say, okay, Lord Jesus, how can I learn about you? How can I become like you? How can I instruct others regarding you through what I'm experiencing? Every child of God has an opportunity to be a worshiper in the middle of their suffering. And what this does, this does a couple of things. Number one, it resets our identity. I love you and I don't want this to sound harsh, or mean or cruel, I hope it's helpful. But when you're suffering and hurting, it is very easy to allow that to become your identity. There's a group that helps people who are addicts. And I really rejoice in the attempt to help addicts. The one thing I disagree with is your addiction sets your identity. Hi, my name is so and so, I'm an alcoholic. No, you're not. If you belong to Jesus, that may be your activity, but that's not your identity. That might explain some of what you do, but that does not define who you are. Okay? He says here that we are, or God's people are saints. Those are holy ones who are loved by God and set aside for His purposes. And Christ in you. That the person, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit is the ministry of Jesus Christ in you and through you. So what that allows is, as a worshiper, my identity is not in my suffering. My identity is in my savior. Okay. The other thing that Paul is doing for us here is very, very helpful. When we are suffering, we become very shortsighted. Right? Make it stop, get it over with, make it end. Because we're hurting, you're hurting. And as a result, we can lose a long view of things. So when he talks about here is the hope of glory. Now, glory is in the presence of Jesus, in the second coming of Jesus, in the kingdom of Jesus. And our hope is that there is glory on the other side. Forever and ever and ever is a very long time. It's like a student who's in school and says, I wanna quit. No, you're gonna graduate, keep going. It's like the athlete who says, I'm dying, I'm walking off the field. No, there's a couple minutes left and then the game is over. It's like the marathon runner who's cramping up, and it's no, no, there's a finish line, and when you get there, you don't have to run anymore, it's over. For the Christian, the suffering is until the hope of glory. You victims need to understand that your suffering is not your identity and it's also not your eternity. And if you are a victim, what can happen is you want to be the center of the universe. Okay, I love ya. I love ya, I totally do. I've been praying for you all week and I hope my heart's in the right place. Let me use myself as an example. Okay, since we're looking for hypocrites. In times past when I have been suffering or hurting, especially if I felt like I was a victim and didn't deserve it, which on many occasions would be open to debate. Don't chuckle wife. I wanted everybody to stop what they were doing and think about me. I wanted everybody to stop their life and focus on mine. I wanted everybody to set aside what they were feeling and I wanted them to pay attention to what I was feeling. I wanted them to push all their needs to the side and put my needs at the center. I wanted the people in my life to orbit around me. I'm a victim, I'm hurting. I'm suffering. What about me? Pay attention to me, love me. Help me, serve me. Don't be so selfish, says the selfish person. And the more that I was the center of my life and had others orbit in circumference around me, the more miserable I became, and the less empathy I had for others. I don't care what you're going through. Do you not know what I'm going through? I don't care that that hurts, I hurt far worse. Let me tell you my terrible tale. Now, what he is doing for us here is he's bringing it all back to Jesus. He's focusing us all back to Christ as the center. Victims who place themselves as the center of their universe, they exhaust all the people who love them, they weary other people out, they lack empathy, sympathy, and compassion, and they lose sight of Jesus and others. I've done this. And if Jesus is at the center and we in our suffering are

orbiting around Him, that allows us to know Jesus, but it also allows us to help others. I learned this from a young girl. She was probably not even maybe junior high age at the time. I'll tell you a story as an example. My family and I were in easily the hardest, most painful, difficult, brutal season of our entire life. We were, we were basically housebound. I mean, going to the grocery store was a situation, media were outside, helicopters were overhead, people threw rocks at the kids, nails in the driveway. Death threats, hate mail nailed to the fence. I mean, we were on lockdown just trying to survive. And I felt like me and my family were the center of the universe. And then a dear family that we love very much, a couple of our dearest friends, they've got four kids that are young, two of whom have spina bifida, meaning there's no functionality from basically the waist down. They can't walk. They can't go to the bathroom. All that kinda stuff. This family lived a few hours away from us and we lived near the nearest children's hospital. And so at a moment's notice, with no forewarning, something would happen to one of the children, they'd throw him in the car and drive a few hours, sometimes over a snowy pass, to run the children's hospital. They had made that emergency drive over a 100 times. It's like, your life is settled, then it's like a snow globe, everything goes up. Everybody in the car, we're going miles away. And what happens to our job, our house? When are we gonna be back? We don't know. Is the child gonna live or die? We don't know. Will there be surgery? We don't know. We have no idea what the future holds. And so this family called and they said we had an emergency. The shunt in our daughter's head is blocked. And as a result, there's swelling and this could take her life. And so we're coming over to the hospital for yet another emergency surgery. And I said, well, okay, you could live with us. Grace agreed, the kids agreed. So they show up. And at various times, there's mom or dad, or mom and dad, and the four kids, and to have spina bifida. And we've got little walkers and the kids can't go to the bathroom by themselves. And one's in the hospital and getting a surgery. And this was leading up to Christmas and they were suffering. And it was a tremendous gift from the Lord to be present for the suffering of others when we were suffering, because it gave great clarity and empathy. I remember thinking my children could die. Nothing I'm going through is of that nuclear option. My children are suffering. I would far rather suffer than watch my children suffer. And this little girl, she's one of the godliest, sweetest, most delightful little girls I've ever met. She's remarkable. I went to see her in the hospital. Her dad sent me the video before the surgery. She was screaming and doubled over and weeping and writhing in pain, a beautiful little blonde girl. And I went to visit her after the surgery. And she was just coming out from under the anesthetic. And they had shaved her whole head, little girl with long blonde hair, shaved to do a surgery, to get into the shunt to stop the swelling in the brain so she wouldn't die. And she has these huge stitches on the side of her head. She's just coming out of her anesthetic induced sleep. Her lips are very dry from being unconscious for hours. And she looks at me and she smiles. "Hi, Mr. Mark." She calls me Mr. Mark. I said, "Hi sweetheart." I said, "How are you?" She said, "No, how are you? "I'm worried about you. "Is there anything I can be praying for you about?" This little girl is more like Jesus than perhaps anyone I've ever met, because she has suffered with Jesus. And there's a hope of glory. I look forward to the day when she picks up her walker and throws it and runs across a meadow and climbs a tree, and that day's coming. She and her family and their suffering were a tremendous gift to me and my family. And having them live literally in the center of our life meant that our suffering was not the center of our life. And it was a great gift to

focus on Jesus and others. I'm not the only person is suffering. I'm not the only person that is in a difficult season. And my suffering is not more important than your suffering. In fact, together, we can suffer. And if we invite Jesus in, we can learn about Him, we can become more like Him, and His presence will be in our midst. Amen? Number three. Must number three, when you're suffering, you must share what you are learning. Colossians 1:28-29, "Him we proclaim," that's teaching, "warning everyone and teaching everyone," there's teaching, "with all wisdom," whatever you're learning, "that we may present everyone mature in Christ. "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy "that he powerfully works within me." What he's talking about here is ministry and maturity. The first thing I need you to know about ministry is that you're in ministry. Okay? If you're a Christian, you're in full time ministry, I hear this all the time. People are like, I feel called into full time ministry. If you know Jesus and you're breathing, you're already called into full time ministry, amen, right? Like, I'll promise you, I'm not closer to God than you are. We all have the same access through Jesus, the same power of the Holy Spirit, right? Wherever you live, whatever you do, you belong to Jesus. You bring the presence of God with you. You're there as a minister, you're there to represent the Lord Jesus. You're there to love and to serve and to forgive and to bless and to be a life-giving person who brings the presence of God into the place that you are. So I don't want you to read this and say, Paul was a super Christian, he did ministry. This doesn't apply to me. Look, you have the same power of God at work in you and through you and wherever you go, you're in full time ministry. Here's what I need you to know about ministry that Paul is alluding to. Ministry is a lifestyle, it's not a job. You know what a job has? A beginning and an end. My first, one of my first jobs, I lied about my age. I was not a Christian, I falsified my birth certificate. I think I was around 16 and I joined a union. So I was a union longshoreman at 16. Okay. And because it was a union job, it was for sure a job. We started like, let's say nine. Nobody showed up early, nobody. If we ended at five, nobody stayed late. On your day off, nobody came in. Okay. We would unload railroad cars. We would unload ships, sacks of peas and boxes. I'll never forget the first break. Whistle goes off. There's a guy holding a box, he literally drops it and walks away. I was like, what are you doing, Jack? He's like, it's break time. You're in the union, boss. I was like, all right, cool. All right? Hey, mothers of small children, does it work like that? Hey, it's break time. No, it's a lifestyle, not a job. I know for a fact, these guys weren't going home, waking up in the middle of the night on Saturday, I hope the forklifts are okay, I hope the forklifts are okay. They didn't care. Ministry is a lifestyle, it's not a job. Because of that, it can be evenings and weekends and disruptions and interruptions. So what you're gonna need is a lot of energy. And this energy comes from the person, the presence, the power of the Holy Spirit to empower you to do ministry to serve others. The second thing I want you to know about ministry, Paul is alluding to it here, your greatest ministry comes from your deepest pain. Paul has experienced much pain, and out of that, he has great ministry. Jesus had much pain and out of that came great ministry. I think it was A. W. Tozer once said, "For God to use you mightily, He must wound you deeply." Here's what this means. The worst part of your life is the best place for your ministry. This is where the Bible says, we can comfort others with the comfort we've received. If you have lost a child, you are most helpful to someone who is losing a child. If you wanted to save your marriage and it fell apart, you're in a strategic position to walk with someone whose marriage is falling apart. If you have faced cancer, you're in a unique position to empathize and sympathize with someone who

is battling cancer. Some of you think I can't do ministry, I've made mistakes. I've had folly, I've committed sins. If you've brought them to Jesus, grown in wisdom and learn from them, that actually qualifies you, not disqualifies you for ministry. There's only one person who got it right all the time. And we killed Him anyways. For the rest of us, we're gonna make our mistakes and by God's grace, learn from them, and then use it for ministry to serve others. Was dealing with someone not long ago, they're in the middle of a divorce. They came to me, they said, Pastor Mark, I need to talk to you, I'm in the middle of this divorce. Tell me your story. They told me their story. It was very painful, it was a betrayal. And I said, there's someone that I know who's walked through something similar. Let me see if they'd be willing to talk to you. And this person actually got offended by me. And they said, oh, so you're gonna pass me off to somebody else? I said, no, no, let me clarify something. I'm not always the most helpful. I've got a church with wonderful people who have learned things I have yet to learn, who have experienced things that never experience. And as a result, they have insights that I don't have. That's the beauty of the church of Jesus Christ. I said, it's not that I don't wanna help you. It's that I want you to get the best help. And I don't think I'm the most helpful. I met my girl at 17 and I've been with her 29 years and we're still together. So I haven't been where you are, but I know someone who's been there and they were with Jesus in the middle of it and they've become like Jesus through it, and I think they'd be very helpful to you. There is great ministry opportunity from the people that are in this room. And for some of you, it is your deepest pain that provides the opportunity for your greatest ministry. And if you're willing to share what Jesus has shared with you as you went through it, with those who are going through it, you are a great, great, great gift. And your ministry is significant. You paid so much for your suffering, for your pain, for your hurt, for your loss. I don't want you to waste it, I want you to invest it. So Paul's talking here about ministry and the goal is maturity. Presenting everyone mature in Christ. Here at The Trinity Church, we do not believe that perfection is attainable in this lifetime, but we do believe that progress is possible in this lifetime. And the progress is progress toward our eternal perfection. The Bible calls that maturity. And maturity is, Lord, what am I to learn now? How am I to grow here? And you need to know that maturity is contingent upon how long you've known the Lord Jesus. When a child is four, maturity looks different for a four year old than it does for a 14 year old, than it does for 34 year old, than it does for a 64 year old, than it does for an 84 year old. Maturity is a lifelong process. We're always in class and we're always learning and growing. And I wanna commend the older saints in this church. This is the first time in my life I've actually had the honor of pastoring some older saints. And the older saints that are coming to this church, I ask them, why are you coming? They say, 'cause we want to grow. We want to learn. God is not done with us. We don't believe in retiring from your walk with Jesus. That's amazing. You're not just reading the books you used to read, reciting the verses that you used to memorize and leaning back on the lessons that you once learned. You're still maturing. And that's Paul's heart for each of us. Lord, what's the next step? Where do I need to grow? Where's the foolishness? Where do I need to grow up spiritually? And then along the way you share what you're learning. Fourth and final point, and it's a long one, and I'll summarize it. Let me do this. Father God, right now, I feel inclined to just pray for these people. Lord, I feel that they need to know that you love them, that you care for them, that your heart is a Father's heart. That what they have been through, what they are going through, or what is on the horizon for them, is something that apart

from you, would be too much for them. But by your power and with your presence, they can endure, they can persevere. They can not just get through it, but they can, they can meet you, learn about you, and become like you in the midst of it. Holy Spirit, would you heal the hurts of these people at the level of the soul? Would you do a work in them that only you can do? To bring healing to their hurt, to bring a lifting of their burden, to bring wisdom where they have been foolish, to bring grace where they have sin, to bring hope where they have been discouraged, to bring a love for others if they have been so focused on themselves that they've lost sight of others. Holy Spirit, before we move on to the final point of the sermon, and I know that I am long, and I thank you for the grace of these people to allow me to teach, would you place Jesus in the center of our hearts? Would you place Jesus in the center of our minds? Would you place Jesus in the center of our families? Would you place Jesus in the center of our vocations? Would you place Jesus in the center of our schedule? Would you place Jesus in the center of our budget? Would you place Jesus in the center of our day? Would you place Jesus in the center of our church? Would you place Jesus in the center of our city? So that we might have hope and help in healing, that we might know more about Jesus, that we might become more like Jesus, that we might help others to meet the Jesus who loves us so well. And Lord, I pray that these people would know of your deep affection for them, that some are bruised, some are hurting, some are wounded, and you are safe and you are tender and you are kind and you are gentle, and a bruised reed you will not break. That they can find themselves safe in your hands and healed by the hands of the one who is the great physician. And so Jesus, before I complete this final point, please just touch the hearts of the people. These are your dear people and you love them. And I thank you for that, in Jesus' name. Amen. Just felt like you needed to be prayed for. And I love ya, and I'm sorry for your suffering, but it could be the greatest opportunity that God has ever given you to mature in Christ. And so I want that for you. So my last point. Start with Jesus, stay with Jesus, and end with Jesus, amen? All right. Colossians 2:1-5. "For I want you to know "how great a struggle I have for you." Right, his heart is one of devotion and commitment. I pray that mine would be the same for you. "At Laodicea." So this is Colossae and Laodicea, he's writing to a couple churches in a region. "And for all who have not yet seen me face to face." These people had never even met Paul. Somebody doesn't need to know you to help you. They can provide instruction that helps you. "That their hearts may be encouraged "being knit together in love," there's the relationship, "to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding "and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures "of wisdom and knowledge." What he says is everything you need to know is ultimately about the person and work of Jesus. He says, "I say this in order that no one may delude you "with plausible arguments, for though I am absent in body, "yet I'm with you in spirit, "rejoicing to see your good order "and the firmness of your faith in Christ." Here's what he's saying. For you to mature, you need three things. Teaching. Life happens and we don't know how to interpret it. Even when we're suffering, God, what is happening? Teaching, Bible teaching, Jesus-centered instruction is absolutely essential for your maturing. So number one, you need teaching. Number two, he's saying, relationships, okay? Knit together in love, walking together, right? That's what he's talking about, relationships. So the first question is, okay, how is my, how is my learning about Jesus? Right? Am I reading my Bible? And if you don't, if you don't read your Bible, get a Bible and start reading it. Get the ESV Study Bible and start reading

it. It's got notes that might help you answer your questions. Some of you, you're like, I don't know how to put together a Bible reading plan. There's something called YouVersion, it's a Bible app. Just get it, put it on your phone. There's all kinds of Bible reading plans. It'll come right to your phone. Just read God's word every day. Your body needs water and air and your soul needs the word of God. Okay, it just does. So how's your reading? What podcasts do you listen to? What teachers or preachers do you listen to? What books are you writing? What are you learning? Secondly, who are you processing it with? Who are you praying with? Who are you learning with? Who are the people that you invite into your life that are safe and godly into relationship and community so you can be knit together in love? And what's so curious, we're part of something called an Accelerator Group. It's this multimillion dollar grant that this organization has, and they're doing mega data on millennials and they're studying how people change and how societies be transformed. And they've included churches from three cities and we're one of 'em, and Phoenix is one of 'em. And they just gave this amazing mind-blowing presentation of how people and families and generations and cities and legacies change. And drum roll please, they said it takes two things, teaching and relationships. I was like, it took millions of dollars to tell us that we need the Bible in the church. That's what it took. Okay. Eventually, the sciences and the social sciences catch up with God's word, right, just wait patiently. And what they found was people don't change unless they have content and relationships. Just content alone won't cause you to change and mature. You need somebody to process it with. Just relationships alone won't cause you to mature, you need the input of healthy content, Bible teaching. And then the third thing that he gives us is discernment. He says that there are delusional, plausible arguments. What that means is not only is there healthy food, there's unhealthy food. There's not only nutritious instruction, there's poisonous instruction. That's what he's saying. Not everything on the internet is true. Help me get that out. Hope other people would just contribute to that great fact. Not everything on the news is true. I don't know if you've heard this. Not all news is true. Not everything is factual and actual. There are false teachers, there are false doctrines, there is bad instruction. But what happens is they have plausible arguments. Meaning any foolish, crazy, nonsensical, nuttier than a Snickers bar thing that somebody can think about, there's somebody educated beyond their intelligence who's willing to get on the news and put together an argument that you listen to and you go, that's pretty compelling. That's pretty compelling. And what you need then is discernment to know, you know what? That is not in alignment with God's truth. That is in error. Even though the argument is compelling, it is not helpful or factual. Now, I've gone too long, and I thank you for your time. I felt compelled because of what you're going through or those you love are going through to make it a priority to take some time. And at this point in the sermon, I'm supposed to wrap it all up with a great conclusion. You will decide what the conclusion of the sermon is. My job is to teach, your job is to live. And how you live is really the closing of my sermon. And because I love you, I want you to meditate on these things and to consider these things and to live, even in the midst of your suffering, in a way that is good for you and good for others and glorifying for God. I love ya, and you will be, you will be the close of the sermon. Your life will be the close of the sermon. Father, thank you for an opportunity to teach God's word today. And Lord, we laughed a lot at the nine and here at the 10:45, the tone got a little more serious and a little more somber. Lord God, I think of Ecclesiastes where it says that a sad face is good for the

heart. Lord, these are your people, and right now we invite your presence. Lord, the Apostle Paul was in jail. He couldn't... couldn't be active with the normal duties of life. He couldn't be distracted with the false trinity of hurry, worry, and busy. He was forced to stop, he was forced to sit, he was forced to listen, he was forced to consider. And Holy Spirit, you met with him. You gave insight to him. You healed him. You encouraged him. You directed and instructed and corrected him. Holy Spirit, in the strong name of Jesus, we stop right now. We stop what we're doing. We stop what we're thinking about. We meet with you. We invite your presence, Holy Spirit, to be in us and through us and among us. We ask that as you ministered to Paul, you would minister to us. As you gave instruction to Paul, that you would give instruction to us. That as you gave a ministry to Paul, you would give a ministry to us. Holy Spirit, would you do in us and through us the same kind of thing that you did for Paul, so that these words would be living words and that they'd be written on the lives of the people who you love so much. And so God, as we come to you to worship, we say that Jesus is the center and our suffering is in relation to His suffering. And that we want to use that suffering to learn about Him, to meet with Him, to become like Him. Jesus, you were alive, and one day you are coming again, and we look forward to the hope of glory. Until then, help us practices as we worship, in Jesus' good name, amen.