



## PART 4: OVERFLOWING WITH GRATITUDE

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(The following text is automatically generated and has not been edited)

Caleb Willis 0:00

So Kim and I found out we were gonna be expecting our first child a few years ago, and one of our friends wanted to encourage us, and he pulled me aside, and he looked me in the eyes and gave me a word of advice, a word of encouragement that has really marked me. He said, Caleb, as a parent, you have the distinct honor and privilege of establishing what your child will come to view as normal, you get to establish what your child will define as normal for their lives. That thought blew my mind, and then I honestly started reflecting back on my childhood with my parents, and I was like, What? What were the things for me growing up that were quote, unquote normal that I realized as I got older, weren't as normal for other people. Maybe two things came to mind right away. We had a very strict rule at the dinner table that there would be no singing under any circumstance at our dinner table. And I thought this was an issue that was running rampant across North America, that children everywhere were being placed in time out or punished for singing while trying to chew food. And I came to find out, as I met, you know, other people that didn't live in my home, that that was not really an issue for other homes. So that was normal in our house. The second thing that was really normal for us was that we loved to play games. Almost all of our family's quality time was playing games. It was sports, outdoors. It was board games, it was card games. We love playing games. My dad was big into sports. He coached us growing up in every sport we played, not so much a board game or a card game player, unless you pulled out one specific game, and this game was called balderdash. Have any of you played this game? Okay, I'm gonna have to explain it then. So here's what happens in the game of balderdash. Your goal is to be the best liar in the circle. So an example of a prompt, you see a card it says, January 12, 1972 now all of you are furiously writing down what you think would be believable that happened January 12 in 1972 you put all your answers in the middle, and the true answer is also placed in the middle. Then you vote, and the way that you get points is if you fool enough people to guessing that your lie was actually the truth. We played this game probably for like, 15 years growing up. And my dad, who served as a pastor here for almost two decades, never lost that game a single time. To our family, he beat us every time. It's why he loved playing it. And I think this was true for two reasons, actually, the first reason, if you know my dad, he's a compelling storyteller. He's an author. He weaves great narratives, and we fell for it every time. But then secondly, and maybe a little bit more importantly, me and my four younger brothers, growing up in the 2000s had no clue what was happening in the world in the 1970s like we had no frame of reference. I'm pretty sure my youngest brother would have answered that prompt with the telephone was invented in the 1972 January, 12 date. And you know, come to find out, it's really hard to discern what's a lie when you don't have a framework for what's true. It's really hard to know what's fake when you can't verify what's true. That was a lesson we learned through the game of balderdash and in a much more serious and spiritual way, this is the act, the exact same issue that the apostle Paul is addressing here in Colossians chapter two. He's encouraging the believers to stand firm in the faith, to not be pulled away by empty deceit or worthless notions, but to stand firm in the Gospel of Jesus as a reminder the movement of Jesus, the movement of Christianity, was in its infancy at this point. Paul's writing this letter in 62 ad around then, so the church is 30 years old. For context, this church, bent tree Bible is almost double that age. We turn 50 next year. The whole Christian Church is 30 years old at this point, Jesus' life, death and resurrection have just happened. It has massive implications for all these believers lives, but they're not really sure what's the totality of everything I need to believe in. What should I say yes to, what should I say no to, what should I do? What should I avoid doing? And Paul is hoping to address this here in Colossians chapter two, the implications are massive. Can you imagine if 30 years into the movement of Jesus, the early church just veered a little bit off course, like two degrees off course? Where would we be now, 2000 years after that, way off his right? It is vital that Paul addresses any heresy and brings clarity to the truth of the gospel of Jesus. I think it's important then, definitely important when he's writing the letter then. And you know what? The Gospel can never be clear. Too clear to us today, either. So we're

gonna jump in. This is our fourth week studying the book of Colossians. We spent the first three weeks on Colossians chapter one, and today we have 31 minutes to do all of Colossians chapter two. So I hope you're ready for this. We're gonna treat this a little bit more like a bus tour. So there's gonna be a few moments where I point out the window as we keep driving on by, and then there's gonna be a few minutes where we park the bus and we all get out and we sit and talk about the Scripture a little bit more in depth. You ready? All right, here we go. Colossians, chapter two, Paul desires that our hearts be encouraged and joined together in love in verse two, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery. Christ in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Paul is continuing what he has already articulated in Colossians chapter one, that Christ is supreme and sufficient above all things in Him are all wisdom and knowledge. These two things can get confused and muddled pretty quickly, right? So when we think about knowledge in the spiritual sense, we're thinking about the accumulation of understanding, but when we think about wisdom, we're actually thinking about how to apply that knowledge in a faithful manner. And we see Paul's telling us here in Colossians, two three, that we actually find both of those things in Christ Jesus, he uses three specific words, mystery, hidden and treasures. All three of those words have implications, that there's something to be looked for, there's something to be sought after. And we'll see the importance of this later, as Paul brings the church a warning, he continues in verse number four. I'm saying this so that no one will deceive you with arguments that sound reasonable. Here he's laying the framework and the basis for why he's writing this entire portion of the letter. This letter is really different to his letter say to the church in Galatia, where he's having to correct and change some really bad theology and some really bad practice. That's not necessarily going on here, but there's a lot of extra spiritual types of worship that aren't the gospel that are going on around the church in Colossians. So there's built up confusion. So Paul's saying, I'm saying this so that you will not be deceived by things that sound reasonable. We've all been convinced before that something sounds reasonable, but then we get into the weeds of it, and we realize, okay, maybe that actually wasn't so reasonable. When it sounds reasonable, it's reasonable in thought only. But when it is reasonable, it's reasonable in thought and in its function. Libman mentioned Jim Carrey last week. Is a great analogy. We all know people who have strived their entire lives. They've found a mountain top, they've diagnosed it as their mountain to climb. And they go climb it, and they get to the top of it, and what do they look out and see that it wasn't fulfilling, that it wasn't worth everything that they thought it would be worth. It sounded reasonable, but then you got into the practice of it, and it actually wasn't reasonable. And this is what Paul is trying to address and keep the Colossians from stepping into he wants them to walk specifically with Jesus, not attempt to walk out beyond him. So he continues in verse six. So then, just as you have received Christ, Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in Him, being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught and overflowing with gratitude. We're going to come back to verse six in a few minutes, but I want to point out something in verse seven, gratitude, or Thanksgiving, is mentioned seven times in these short four chapters in the Letter to the Colossians. We know when things are repeated, they're repeated for emphasis. So this is a subtle motif that's going through the entire letter to the church in Colossae, and the term gratitude, we can think in more individualistic terms naturally than we maybe should sometimes, and so we may perceive that as just like I have a feeling of gratefulness, what Paul actually means, a more true interpretation of it is an expression. That's why the word overflowing is tied to it. It's an expression of gratitude. So Bob Coughlin, in his great book worship matters, says this about expression joy and gratitude. He says people show demonstrative emotion all the time at rock concerts and at basketball games, and no one ever questions it. Why do we think guests will be surprised to see it in people who claim to have the greatest news the world has ever heard. I think gratitude that overflows should be a distinguishing marker of the Christian church and in her gatherings,

Caleb Willis 9:55

I would humbly argue that much of the modern church can lack a spirit of gratitude, because we would, we often find ourselves in positions where we would just rather do for God than ever actually be with him. We're quick to forget or forego the many blessings of just sitting and experiencing God. We've sacrificed those things on the altars of optimization and efficiency, where if we can't prove that this was worth this much output, then it's not worth even attempting. And so we forget to just ever sit in the presence of God. To use more of an old school church language. We've forgotten the skill of tarrying with the Lord. What it looks like to do that, to sit with the mystery that's Christ, to look for what's hidden in Him, and to seek the treasure that's found in him, and only him, as this passage will remind us, we have been buried with Christ. We have been raised with Christ, and we have received Christ. There is plenty to be grateful for. The question is not, is there something worthy of my gratitude? It's, am I taking time to express the gratitude and one of the most natural ways to continue to walk in Him, being rooted in him, is to express this gratitude. When we try and skip past gratitude and jump over that in the Christian life and just get to the doing part of it, what we find is that we actually start to serve Him, and it's out of a sense of obligation instead of a position of relationship, and we can get unhealthy when we do that. Oswald Chambers, the

guy who wrote my utmost for his highest, says this about serving the Lord. The snare in Christian work is to rejoice in how much you've done or in the fact that God has used you. Our tendency is to place the emphasis on service rather than relationship. Beware of people who make usefulness their standard. If usefulness is the measure of our success, then Jesus Christ was the greatest failure who ever lived. Consider how our Lord spent his time on Earth for three years. All he did was to walk about saying things and healing sick people a useless life according to every human standard of success and of enterprise. When we are following the example of our Lord, we know that what counts is the work God does through us, not the work we do for him. The only standard our Lord takes note of in our lives is our relationship to God, which is meant to be the relationship between a father and his children. So church, we must take time to be grateful for who he is and what He has done for us, because we don't want to walk in him like Paul encourages us to do out of a feeling of obligation or a sense of obligation, but rather strengthened in our relationship with Him. First, Thessalonians Paul writes another letter to the church in Thessalonica in chapter five, he says, Give thanks in all circumstances. Don't you love it when modern science actually lines up and affirms what the Bible has always told you to be true. There's been a number of scientific studies done recently in what repeated expressions of gratitude do to your body, and what they have found is heightened levels of dopamine and serotonin, which are the feel good chemicals that your body releases. And so consistent expression of gratitude can actually help rewire your brain to be more joyful and more resilient. Paul knew that he probably didn't know what dopamine and serotonin are, but he knew this long before we did consistently expressing gratitude for who God is and for what he's done is important. We can't skip that step. We can't skip it all right. Back on the bus, we go verse eight, be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ. So in this verse, we find something highly, unusual. We find a Greek word that's not used anywhere else in Scripture. In English, it's translated to the phrase take you captive. The Greek it is sylaga gone, renowned theologian in T Wright, in his beautiful biography on the apostle Paul, hints that a potential wordplay is happening here in the original Greek that we would not be able to see if we were just reading it in the plain English like we do. So if you were to change, if you were to take the word sylagaon, which means take you captive, and you were to change one little pin stroke in the Greek, just a tiny shift, it would actually bring you to the word synoagon, which stands for take you to the gathering, or take you to the synagogue. That's where we get that. So what N T Wright thinks the Apostle Paul is actually doing here? Is he saying you can have the synonym the gathering of the believers? You can have that. And if you try and take one little thing and either add it or sub. Attract it. It actually takes you captive and takes you away to a completely different place. Paul is writing this so that we will not be carried away by empty deceit in the notions of this world. You can have something that looks so close to the real thing, but take you to a position that's totally different. We have to be careful that nothing takes us captive by being anchored in what we know to be true. Ironically, the apostle Paul does not make it abundantly clear what the specific Colossian heresy is here. He doesn't rat out who the leaders are of this heresy, who's actually spreading it, but what he does with perfect clarity is remind us of what is true. And if you're anything like me, it's often easier for me to point out things that I disagree with, things that I think are wrong, versus standing for what I think is right. And because Paul's not divulging specifics on the heresies or the leaders. I think he's reminding us that we don't actually have to get caught up in assigning things as false when we're tethered to what we know to be true. That's kind of wasted energy, that's wasted space. We don't have to finger point and talk about what's false, what we disagree with, when we're tethered and anchored to what we know to be true, Paul continues reiterating the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in verse nine, for the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ, and you have been filled by him who's the head over every ruler and every authority. You were also circumcised in him with the circumcision not done with hands, by putting off the body of flesh. In the circumcision of Christ when you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead, there's some odd phrasing here, but circumcision, in the Jewish context, was a physical symbol of a covenant relationship. And what Paul is communicating in this letter to the Colossians is he's saying that covenant relationship has been achieved. You've been circumcised in you've been circumcised in Christ's circumcision, but it hasn't been achieved with human hands, meaning we weren't the ones who earned our way into it. It's been done through the life, the death and the resurrection of Christ, Jesus, verse 13, when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt with its obligations that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. This scripture is one of the reasons we sang the song, raised with Christ this morning. My sin is canceled. He has nailed it to the cross. That's based right here. Verse 15, He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly. He, being God, triumphed over them, being the enemies and him being Christ. The next verse begins with the word therefore. And if you've been here a while, you know that there's a specific question we ask when we see the word therefore, we say, what's it there for? Thank you. Wow. This section was really strong on that you never start a Bible study with the word therefore. The word therefore is building on a thought. It's continuing a thought. So think about

where we've already been this morning, the ground we've covered, the hidden mystery, the treasure in Christ, the overflowing gratitude we have for who he is and what he's done, the charge to not be taken captive and swept away by empty deceit, the reminder that Christ is supreme above all, that his work is complete, that his enemies have been publicly disgraced, and he has triumphed over them. Therefore don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of what was to come. The substance is Christ. The reason that verses 16 and onward can be true is because Christ has accomplished all things for us. Everything else was a shadow. The substance is Jesus Himself, 18. Let no one condemn you by but by delighting in ascetic practices, in the worship of angels, claiming access to a visionary realm. Such people are inflated by empty notions of their unspiritual mind. You can feel the intensity of Paul's language, can't you? He's reiterating that the gospel of Jesus is not something to be tampered with. It's not to be messed with.

Caleb Willis 19:57

In the year 1891 James Naismith. South invented what would become my favorite sport of all time. He was a PE teacher in the Northeast, and the winters were really harsh, so he wanted to create some sort of game to keep his athletes fit in the off season. And so with a peach basket and a leather ball, tacked it to a pole, and he called it basketball, and that's how the sport was born. Now, what he created was nothing like what you're thinking of, what however much you know about basketball, it's not like what you were thinking of. Legend has it? When basketball originated, the players were on the ground floor and would just be running around. There's actually not even boundary lines. Yet, boundary lines didn't exist in the sport, and the observers would be on a second story balcony that enclosed it, and as the players threw or shot, I don't know if it was more of a throw or a shot back in that day when they shot the basketball, if you as an observer, were close enough, you could just swat at it and knock it away like you were playing, as an observer, you were partaking in the sport of basketball. So the year 1903 came around, and they're like, this needs boundaries of some kind. Let's make a really long rectangle. The year 1912 happened, and so they decided, let's do more of a net that has like a hole in the bottom of it, so we don't have to stop playing every time someone scores. The year 1979 happened and they implemented the three point line, which, if you know anything about today's game, it's really surprising that there was a point in history where the three point line didn't exist. So if you gathered someone who played basketball in the 1890s in the 1950s and in the early 2000s together, and you asked each of them this simple question, how do I play basketball? You would get drastically different answers, to the point where you'd probably look at at least two of them and say, D Have you played basketball like Do you know how this sport works? The reality is, basketball had to iterate. It had to adapt. It had to change. It had to grow over time. This doesn't just apply to basketball. Think about your favorite sport, the place you like to shop the most, your favorite restaurant where you like to eat, the car you want to drive. They're constantly coming out with updates and upgrades and adaptations. They have to keep up with the times and grow and learn and change. In fact, some of the world's biggest and at one point best things died off because they were unable to grow and to develop and to change. So if I'm honest, reading this part of the letter to the church in Colossae, I actually feel a little bit of empathy for these people. Nowhere in this letter are they like, No, we don't want Christ. We don't think he's legitimate. They're saying, yeah, no, that's a good update. We'll take him and then let's do the angel worship part too. Like they were what Dr Bach calls spiritually enthusiastic. So they want to do all the spiritual things. They're not looking at Christ as the only thing they're potentially they're being tempted to look at him as one of many things. Can we take the Jewish customs and tradition and bring that in with the Jesus part too? Let's do the Jesus part, and then let's try and visit some visionary realms and worship the angels too. Sure, those are all good updates. Let's do all of them. And Paul is having to be abundantly clear, while there are many things in our lives that have had to adapt, that have had to grow, that have had to evolve and change, the gospel of Jesus, Christ does not get to be one of them. The gospel is just Jesus. It's nothing more than that. It's nothing less, and it's certainly nothing else. It is simply Jesus. He continues his commentary on those who are getting carried away in verse 19, they don't hold on to the head, from whom the whole body nourished and held together by its ligaments and tendons grows with growth. From God, if you died with Christ to the elements of this world, why do you live as if you still belong to the world? Why do you submit to regulations? Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch. All these regulations refer to what is destined to perish by being used up their human commands and doctrines, although these have a reputation for wisdom by promoting self made religion, false humility and severe treatment of the body, they are not of any value in curbing self indulgence, holding on to the head, which is Christ in verse 19, and receiving nourishment. These are both active phrases. So here, I think, is where the entire Colossians two passage fits together, gratitude for what he's done. 10 anchors us into what is true, and it causes us to grow in how we live. Gratitude for who he is and what he's done, anchors us down into what is true, and it causes our lives to look different because of it, Paul's using language all across Chapter Two that require proximity. He's using language that requires a certain level of proximity. And positionally, you have all the proximity to God you could ever dream of. You could not

fabricate or recreate a closer relationship to God. It is quite literally impossible because of what he has done for you and me. And yet, often the struggle for believers in the new covenant of Jesus is that we can easily assume that since God is proximate to my life, then he must be prominent in every facet of my life, that because he's proximate, then I have an intimacy with Him, because we're generally in the same area there. We're now very engaged with one another. And Paul is actually trying to drive home this point in a deeper way. He is saying positionally, you are in Christ. Now let's have your practice emulate that we practice from our position in Christ, Jesus. So for example, you're going to be dismissed here in a few minutes, and you're going to go out into the lobby. You probably saw a few tables out in the lobby. Those are local ministry partners that bin tree partners with you. The second you walk out these doors, will be proximate to those ministry partners, but you're probably not going to know a thing about them unless you were to walk up to a table and say, Hey, what do you do? And how do we as a church, partner with you? There's actually a step of intentionality on your part to step into the engagement piece, the intimacy piece. And this is actually exactly what Paul's calling us to do in Colossians two if you died with Christ to the elements of the world, why do you live as if you still belong to it? He's asking that our practice align with our position in Jesus. Gratitude for what he's done anchors us into what is true, and it causes us to live differently. How would your life look different if it was marked by gratitude, a gratitude that your friends and family would describe as overflowing like not generally a grateful person, but overflowing with gratitude. I'm gonna ask you to do something for me right now. Can you go back and think of every interaction you've had with a human being in your life.

Caleb Willis 27:47

Are you doing it? Was there ever an interaction you had where you walked away from that interaction and you thought that person was just too grateful, too much gratitude for me, gratitude is not something that you can max out. If anything, it will begin to overflow out of you. Gratitude is an important thing for us as believers. So if you're in a position right now where you're like, I do feel like I'm a grateful person to God for who he is and what he's done. Would you be bold and ask God to enlarge your gratitude for him? Maybe your lack of Gratitude has caused you to try and upgrade or update the gospel. You don't think the message of grace is actually compelling enough, so you're going to do the work to make sure that if it is works based he's going to let you into heaven that way too, just in case the grace part wasn't real. Maybe for you, you would not necessarily describe your life as overflowing with gratitude for whatever rhyme or reason, but it's led to this deep feeling of discontentment. So you dig in and you're like, I'll double what we give to the church. I'll sign up to serve anytime a pastor stands up and asks for us to jump in, I'll do more for God. And it's just driving deeper this sense of serving God out of obligation, instead of from a position of relationship, those things start with gratitude. So what if we took this week and just reminded our souls of everything that's been accomplished for us in Christ, I think our lives are going to look really different if our gratitude increases. In fact, I would be shocked if you came back to me next week, right here after service and you're like, Hey, listen, I gratitude through the roof, man, and my life looks exactly the same. I'd be surprised. Honestly, would you stand with me this morning? We're going to close our time. I'm going to read some of the in him, statements that remind us of our position in Christ before we dismiss

Caleb Willis 30:22

these are all the in him statements from chapter two. Just as you have received Christ, Jesus, as Lord, continue to walk in Him, being rooted and built up in him. For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ, and you have been filled by him. You were also circumcised in him. You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him. Through faith in the working of God, He made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses, and he triumphed over them in him. Finally, I'm going to close our time together with the lyrics of a hymn from the 1870s by Thomas rider, buried with Christ and raised with him too. What is there left for me to do? Simply to cease from struggling and strife, simply to walk in newness of life, buried with Christ and dead unto sin, dying but living Jesus within, ruling and reigning day after day, guiding and keeping all of the way, risen with Christ as my glorious head, holiness now the pathway I tread beautiful thought from walking therein, He that is dead is freed from all sin, living with Christ who dieth no more, following Christ who goeth before not under law. I'm now under grace. Sin is dethroned and Christ takes his place. Can I pray for you, Heavenly Father, I pray this morning that you would be able, in a way, that only you are able, to increase our sense of gratitude simply for who you are, that it would be hard for us to get past the description of holy when we pray to you that that gratitude just for who you are would lead us into a deeper sense of gratitude for all that you have accomplished, all of these in him, statements that we see in Colossians chapter two, would that anchor us in the truth of your gospel, nothing more, nothing less and nothing else that would cause us to walk differently, because we know we walk not out of obligation, but in a relationship with you and father. Just selfishly, I pray over our church that every time we gather would be marked by gratitude that overflows from person to person, that these kinds of First Corinthians, 14 moments where people who are not believers

walk into our gatherings say, Surely The Lord is among you.

Caleb Willis 33:21

Holy Spirit. Thank you for daily reminding us of the truth of the gospel. We love you, God. It's in your name that we pray amen for.