

# Loving Our Neighbors by Fulfilling Your Calling in Christ

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*The Gospel – Greatest Love Story*

By Dustin Folden

**Bible Text:** Hosea 14:9; Hosea 1-2

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## **Faith Church**

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:** <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

**Online Sermons:** <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

Well, first I want to start off by just saying thank you. Thank you to those in our church family who sacrificially served all through the month of December from Living Nativity, Christmas For Everyone, to the winter break ministries. I mean, there was a lot going on as I mentioned earlier. And I'm happy to report that over 10,500 people went through the Living Nativity which is the highest total in fifteen years. Praise God for that! Absolutely, you can clap for that. Praise God! People who have heard the Gospel, been strengthened by the Gospel, who are now considering if Jesus is going to be their Lord and Savior.

Well, today is the final Sunday of 2014. And this year we've been all about loving our neighbors and so we're going to focus today on "Loving Our Neighbors by Fulfilling Your Calling in Christ." You see, Jesus taught two great Commandments: loving God and loving others. Upon these two commandments rest the whole Law and the Prophets, in other words, the whole Bible. The Bible in Cliffs Notes is: love God and love others. You now know the whole Bible. Congratulations. But there is a bit more to it than that.

The latter commandment, love others, was what occupied a great portion of our year, and by God's grace we've been able to grow in a few areas. These are the areas we identified as we've sought to love our neighbors. The first one was implementing our soul care; caring for one another's souls to achieve deeper friendships within our church family. I think this mentality needs to be a focus every year. Don't you? Don't we constantly being closer and closer to each other year after year? We can always get to a better place. But I think it was good this year to especially think about how we can make for some efforts to love your neighbor, the person living in the blue chair right around you. I think the Lord gave us some success, especially in our Adult Bible Fellowship ministries, our ABF ministry. That ministry just plain old grew this year. More people came to ABFs this year than last. There are more people serving in leadership roles in each ABF. And I would encourage you if you haven't been involved in the ABF for a while or never checked it out, I would really encourage you to get involved in an Adult Bible Fellowship.

Also, our second initiative this year was as individual church members growing our ability to build strong relationships with those who live right around us. Maybe when

Jesus said, "Love your neighbors," He meant love your actual neighbors, people who live right near you, who you see on a regular basis. Stewardship celebration highlighted this emphasis. We can praise God that many of us can confess we've tried to make an effort to get to know our neighbors better. Not just run into our garage and close it quickly, but maybe linger and seek to serve them more this year. By God's grace, I think we took some steps.

We also sought to develop a parish mentality, to view our neighborhood as a place of a parish where we can minister to people, whether it be snow shoveling. Remember last year that was a hit. This year, not needed quite as much. There wasn't quite as much snow, just a few inches less. We haven't been needed this much this year to help people shovel their driveways off, but they know that when the snow falls we're going to be there to love our neighbors. We're on the map in the neighborhood. They know we want to love them, just like our December Winter Break ministries. They know, these one hundred and seventy kids whose parents are looking for child care, we know we want to serve them, and we want to love on them. Also we talked about our CDC, our loving in urban neighborhoods with excellence. We've talked a lot about that. It's not just fixing up homes. It's providing the financial, spiritual, and life resources to those who are in that stage of life, who just need a helping hand to grow. And then our Senior Living Community. Praise God that phase one is sold out! All the houses are sold, and they are ultimately finishing up constructing the homes.

So the bottom line is, individually as a church family we've had lots of opportunities to love our neighbors. So we're all done, right? I mean, it's the end of the year. We don't have to love our neighbors anymore, right? No! Of course not! We want to thank the Lord for the privilege that we've had this year, but keep it going into the New Year. Just because this year is over doesn't mean we stop loving our neighbors. I think we would all say, "I constantly need to grow. I constantly need to grow in loving God and loving others." And the way you do that, the way you keep going is keeping your eyes fixed on the Author and Finisher of your faith, Jesus. So, we're going to focus on Jesus in a particular way here with a thankfulness for what God has done and is doing and seeing how we can continue to love our neighbors because of a focus on Christ.

So, turn with me, if you will, to Colossians chapter 3. Excuse me, Colossians chapter 3. There is no Colossians 13. Colossians chapter 3 verses 12-17. That's on page one hundred fifty-eight if you're looking for a Bible in the chair underneath the person ahead of you, your neighbor in the blue chair. So, grab a Bible from underneath, if you need that. Go to page one hundred fifty-eight in the back half of the section in the New Testament. We're reading from Colossians 3:12-17. Colossians 3. Let's start in verse 12.

"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one

body; and be thankful. Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

Now, that's a powerful verse. I could just read that and sit down, because there's a lot of good things in there, but I'm going to expound on it a little bit. We're going to dig through it a little bit more. We want to consider four ways we can continue to love our neighbors by fulfilling our calling in Christ. Remember, love God, love others. We want to keep doing this until we see Jesus face-to-face.

Well, the first way we do this, the first way we keep our eyes focused on Jesus by fulfilling our calling in Christ, is clothing ourselves with the righteousness of Christ. That's what verse 12-14 talks about. Now, if you look on the screen here, we see some italic words. And "Those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved." I would like you to underline those words on your handout. Underline those words. "Those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved." Then I want you circle the next phrase, "Put on." "Chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness," all these things. Then, when you get down further on in the verse, it says, "Just as the Lord forgave you." Underline that as well. Underline that as well in your handout, or in your Bible if you're feeling, you know, you're wanting to mark it up. And then verse 14 it says again, "Put all these things. Beyond all these things, put on love." Circle again "put on love."

Now, I'm going to come back to why I had you do that in a moment. In order to clothe ourselves with Christ, in order to put on Christ likeness, in order to put on the characteristics that are personified by Christ, we have to have a foundation for doing that. We have to have a reason to motivate us to do that, and the foundation is who we are in Christ. That's why I had you underline those words. Words like chosen of God, holy, beloved, as well as someone who's forgiven. Paul wants us to focus on who we are, what our identity is. And he actually talked about this a little bit earlier. Back up in your Bibles to chapter 3, verse 1, 2, 3, and 4. And look at verse 3. It says, talking about who you are now, it says, "For you," talking to Colossians, but we can think about it as well, "for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God when Christ," and look at this little parenthetical, "with Christ who is our life," don't you love that, "Christ who is our life is revealed then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." He says, "You've died, and your life is hidden with Christ." You might say, "I'm not dead! I'm right here." But God's Word says, "You're dead. You have died, and you're hidden." You say, "I'm too old to play Hide-and-Go-Seek. I'm not hidden at all!" Well, you're hidden in Christ. You're covered. You're protected. Who you are is always and forever linked to who Christ is and what He did on the cross, if you've come to know Him as your Lord and Savior. And from God's perspective you are covered; you are hidden; you are protected. Christ is your life. In other words, your life, your identity, who you are is all about Christ and if you haven't come to the point where you've died with Christ, you haven't been hidden or protected by Christ, by His work on the cross, I would encourage you, even in this

moment, to consider, "Where does my security come from? Who am I? Is my life all about Jesus because He died on the cross for my sins and that's my only hope of salvation for one day being revealed with God in glory rather than condemnation?" I would encourage you to consider the Gospel of Christ, even today, so that you can have the identity that the whole rest of these verses builds upon. Unless you have the foundation of Christ being your Protector, the one you are hidden in, everything else that follows is going to be impossible to put on with any regularity.

But Paul goes on. He says, "If this is true about you, if Christ is your life, if you've died with Him, and your life is hidden with Him, then build on your identity as someone who is chosen of God, holy and beloved, because in Christ you're chosen of God, because He chose to die for you. You are holy, because Christ's holiness is yours. You're loved, because Christ demonstrated His love for you." Our identity, who we are, is what drives the command, which is what I asked you to circle. The command is "put on." Put on. Put on.

I think this identity can still be a bit confusing, so I want to illustrate a little bit. It's much like wearing a name tag. Have you ever gone to a conference, and the first thing you have to do is check in. You know, "I've got to put on this name tag." And we use it in our ABFs at times. It actually really helps us to kind of know who you are. But can you imagine if you went to a conference, and you pulled out a name tag, and you had the audacity of on your name tag writing the name "Jesus." And you walk around this conference, you know, and you're just, "Hi. Check that out." What would the reaction of people be? Would there be confusion? "Maybe that's really his name," you know. Would there be, you know, like a little chuckle, "Ha ha, ok, that's kind of funny." Would there be disagreement? Maybe those who know you the best would respond with something like, "You ain't Jesus! You are not Jesus!" And you would be quick to say, "You're right. You're right. I'm not Jesus, but I've been reading Colossians 3, and the Bible says that His identity is mine. His name tag is mine. Not that I'm Him in nature, in power, or authority, but I am defined and identified by who He is and what He did. I bear His name as a Christian, a little Christ, a follower of Christ. I bear His name, because I am hidden in Him! Christ is my life! That is who I am! That is my identity! That's why I have this name tag on. And my life is hidden in Christ. So when God looks at me, He sees me as chosen, holy, and beloved, because that's who Christ is. That's why my name tag says 'Jesus,' even though you see Dustin, John, Betty, Mike, God sees Jesus if you've trusted Him as Lord and Savior."

As a side note, if God chooses to view you through this name tag, why do we insist on wearing other name tags? Why do we choose to identify ourselves in different ways that are totally unsatisfying? Name tags like: I'm smart. I'm beautiful. I'm successful. I'm organized. I'm put together. I'm well spoken. I'm intelligent, or I'm athletic. And then we put all of our energy into being viewed that way, and we're frustrated and oftentimes sinfully angry when other people don't view us the way we want to be identified, as any number of things. But if you view yourself like God views you, if Christ is your life, then we're to put on the actual characteristics of God. We're to take the time and energy to become more like what we're identified by, become more like our name tag. This is

where the circle works, the command comes in. We're to now, because we're identified by Christ, put on actual characteristics of Christ, because we are united with Him. He is our life. You have His identity. You are secure, chosen, holy, beloved, so that now, not you can just do whatever you want, you can put on His character. You can become more like your name tag. You can become more like Jesus. We have His name so that we can actually become more like Him.

Write down Romans 13:14 just for a reference. It says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." Don't you just love that? "Put on the Lord Jesus." That's what we're going to be talking about today, because of who you are in Christ. It starts with compassion. You see the flow of the text, out of chosen, holy, and beloved and it's then, "Ok, put on compassion. Be willing to care about others." Basically, when you put on compassion it means, "I care about you. I'm concerned about you. I want to know what is going on in your life: pain points, difficulties, burdens, struggles, trials. I care." Even if it's going to be hard, messy, and take up more of my time that I really want or have to give. "I care about you." The phrase can actually be translated, "bowels of mercy." That's an interesting phrase. "Bowels of mercy." And I think, when we think about that translation, we think about the sense that compassion has an inner man focus. You don't just say some nice words to somebody, because "it's just what I say in this situation." The idea is, "I want to actually have compassion for you on the inside, because I'm concerned about what's going on in your life." I think that starts at a very basic level of remembering a person's name. It's really hard to have bowels of mercy for somebody if you don't know who they are, you know what I mean? You can't have a deep burden for them if you're like, "Who's that guy? Who is she?"

So, it starts by getting to know people, but not leaving it there. Actually knowing what's going on in their life and asking, "How can I be praying for you? What's going on in your life? How can I actually remember and follow up later? Because I remember your name, and I want to bear burdens. I want to have compassion on you." I contest there are few things as cool as two believers getting to know each other and actually caring for each other. I don't think there is anything cooler than that, because it's real. It's compassionate. It's Christ like. I think it would be good for every one of us to think about "how can we put on compassion, even this week?" Maybe it's praying for somebody in your ABF who's going through a trial. Maybe it's just getting to know someone new who sits near you. Maybe it's thinking about a family member with compassion and care instead of frustration and judgment. I think that kindness then, from the inner man, oftentimes moves into kindness, the quality of actually bringing goodness to others, actually doing good for others. The kindness of God in the Bible is oftentimes associated with Him bringing good, manifesting His good to people.

You can jot down Titus 3:4-5, but it's a great illustration of God's kindness in action. It says, "When the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared." He appeared! His kindness appeared! "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Kindness is something that God did, because He is good, not because we deserved it. "Not on the basis of deeds." So, if we're going to put on

kindness, it's going to have very little, nay anything, to do with if the other person deserves it. It's going to be because our character is being more like God's character. It means we'll look for opportunities to say and encourage in word. You're going to try to build somebody up. You're going to try to do a good deed for someone, give them a helping hand. You're looking for opportunities to bring actual good to them, to be kind.

But we have to admit that sometimes the people that we're closest to are the ones we're the harshest with. Isn't that true? Oftentimes the people you know the best, your spouse, your kids, your relatives, those are the ones you get the most snippy with, the ones you don't look always for opportunities of kindness. We have to ask ourselves, "Who, because of who I am in Christ, because of my name tag, am I putting on kindness towards my family, or do I put on an attitude I think they deserve, because they're not meeting my expectations?"

I think when you seek to do good for others, it's also linked to humility, which is the next word in the text. This is definitely something we all need to put on, right? Can I get an Amen? Do we need humility? Yes? I will not admonish you for pride if you don't say amen, but it's not a natural covering! I don't just have humility all the time. It's something I have to put on. In fact, in the ancient world, this was not a virtue. This was not viewed as, "Oh! He's really humble! Yay!" It was, "This is a position of lowliness, of a servant." Humble is not a virtue in the ancient world. He was understood to be lowly, not something worth celebrating. I don't know if in our culture we necessarily celebrate it much either. We celebrate a lot of things: grit, tenacity, drive, skill, resilience, and ability. Humility isn't as flashy, but it is inherently Christ like.

Consider Philippians 2:3, one of the best verses on humility. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others," and here it is, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." He was humble, and yet He was the King of the world. He's like, "I created you. I created you. I created you. I created you." You know, that's the reality! He created us! He is the Creator and the Sustainer of the world, and yet He came to die for you, and for you, and for you, and for you. And yet, one of the ways that we don't put on humility is we get so consumed with our own schedule, our own to-do list, our own activities, our own hobbies, that we don't think about the needs of others around us. If you read the rest of Philippians 2 it goes on to show that Christ personified humility by taking the form of a servant and being obedient as a servant to the point of death, even death on a cross, and He took on weak, human form to serve us, and yet He is the Creator and Sustainer of the world, and He died to serve those who mocked and ridiculed and hated Him. In contrast, we're pretty prideful by nature.

We think we know how to do things best. We think we know what we deserve, and we expect others to function accordingly. "Do you know who I am? Do you know what I've done? How dare you talk to me like that?" We may not always say it, but does that go through your head at times? Christ like humility says, "You are more important than I am. What you think, what you're concerned about, is more important than what I think

and what I'm concerned about." Christ like humility says, "You're more important than I am." Human nature says, "My thoughts, my desires are most important."

Dads, let me talk to you for a minute. You ready dads? What happens when your wife needs help with the kids? What happens when your wife wants to work through something she's anxious about or concerned about? Do you ever say to yourself, "I don't have time for this. I don't need this right now." Have you ever said that to yourself? Husbands, dads, and wives as well, what we need is Christ likeness. What I need is to put on humility and consider you more important than what I want to do right now. And I think dads, we would all confess very, very quickly that we very, very easily go to a place where we consider what we want, what we need, and what we think we deserve, rather than what are your needs? What are your concerns? What's going on right now in your life? How can I serve you right now, because of my name tag, because of my identity, who I am?

And that humility leads right into gentleness. Not just saying, "Fine! I'm going to help you!" But being gentle with you, and not being harsh. Gentleness and humility go hand-in-hand. If you consider others more important than yourselves, you're going to be gentle with them! If you think you're all that, and you've just arrived, and the earth is all better because you're in the room, you're not going to be very gentle with people, because you're focused on yourself. You're not going to speak harshly, or give them dirty looks, or manipulate people to do what you want if you're putting on gentleness. Matthew 11:29 is a great combination of humility and gentleness. Jesus says, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Part of gentleness is not having an inflated view of yourself, not thinking so highly of yourself that it leads you to place heavy burdens on other people. Oftentimes, we place heavy burdens on others by just hurtful and cutting phrases that communicate, "You know what? You are not living up to my expectations. You're not doing good enough! And I'm going to let you know with the tone of my voice, the words I use, your past mistakes brought up in the present, I'm going to be harsh with you, not gentle. And I'm going to weigh you down to help you get to a better place to please me." And we weigh others down with comments that elevate ourselves over them, and not very gentle. And look at the contrast of Christ. Jesus is gentle and humble, but Jesus is the one with all authority, the Creator and Sustainer of the world. Yet, He exercises His authority with gentleness, where it brings rest to people, rather than placing a heavy burden on them. In our tongues we have the ability to bring life or death to people. We can be gentle or we can crush them with just a few words. Put on gentleness, because of your name tag.

How about patience? Responding graciously over the long haul, even when you're provoked. Patience takes the clock out of the equation. The clock is not a factor. It doesn't say, "I'm going to be humble. I'm going to be kind. I'm going to be gentle. I'm going to be compassionate to a point." It says, "I'm going to be Christ like as long as God gives me this opportunity to be Christ like, and then I'm going to go on to the next opportunity, because Christ is my life. I don't have this stopping point." If kindness is about proactively bringing goodness to others, patience is a bit more reactionary. Patience is looking at your life, your decisions, and me responding to you in patience. What if we

said to people, our kids, what if we said to people, instead of "You're trying my patience," have you ever said that before? Come on parents! "You're getting on my last nerve." "You're trying my patience," as though there is a threshold, that you're then now justified by responding after they've passed that threshold, right? "You're trying my patience!" What if you said, "You are trying my Christ likeness." Would that change the way you think about it? "You are trying and challenging me to see how Christ like I am, and you're succeeding, and I'm not very Christ like." Wouldn't that change the focus from them to me? Now, not in a prideful way, but in a Christ like focus.

I want to be transparent with you for a moment. This is usually the area I ask my kids' forgiveness the most, patience. It's often when I'm trying to parent, or train, or just get their shoes on. I come to a point where I don't want to provide gracious leadership anymore. I just want them to do what I want, even if what I want is a good thing. I want it right now, and I've put on now anger or frustration instead of Christ likeness. Because I'm focused on training my kids, I've forgotten what my heavenly Father is doing to train me in that moment. I'm training my kids to listen to me and obey, but my heavenly Father is training me to become more like Christ in that very moment. Do I view my kids or other people and their responses to life as opportunities for my heavenly Father to train me, or do I just want them to do what I want now, even if it's good? Do we view other people's responses in situations as opportunities for us to grow, or as inconveniences? Put on patience, because of your name tag.

You know, that kind of leads into bearing with one another. Choosing to put up with each another. You know you read this, "I'm going to put up with you!" You're like, "That's a great approach!" And we read this, and it seems like it's this step of, you know, being begrudged, like, you know, if the person you like the least is now combined with you, and you have to work on a project together, and you're like, "I don't like this person, but we have to work together for the sake of the project, and we have to just do it." Well, I would say that bearing with one another is not the depth of brotherly love, but it's the beginning of loving someone who may be difficult to love. Before you say, "Oh yeah, I have lots of people like that in my life," before you say, "I have lots of difficult people that I have to bear with," just remember that you might be that person for somebody else. Just remember that that might be you for somebody else. Maybe a tad bit of humility as we read that passage, and don't think about others immediately. You know, Ephesians 4:2 says, "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance," or it can be translated, "bear with one another in love." Bear with each other in love. In the body of Christ you're not going to mesh perfectly with everybody, but that's an opportunity to show love. You may not always mesh well with your spouse, or your grown kids, or your young kids, or your neighbors, or your in-laws, or your relatives, and sometimes you need to bear with one another, but you can do it in love rather than clenched fists. Bear with one another in love, because of your name tag.

Forgive one another. Relinquish offences. I don't think it's a mistake to have forgiving listed right after bearing with one another, because oftentimes we're not able to bear with one another, and we sin against each other. We hurt each other. We say words that tear down, that are not gentle or kind. Forgiveness really comes down to: how deeply has this



person offended me compared to how deeply I have offended God with my life? If I'm going to forgive you, I'm probably going to do some sort of calculation mentally that says, "How bad of an offense was this?" And if you believe that this person has offended you more than you have offended a holy God, you are going to ride your self-righteous horse down a place of bitterness rather than forgiveness. You don't understand that you needed such a degree of forgiveness that this is a small, tiny portion of forgiveness to give to somebody else. If you're aware of how much you needed Jesus to die for you, because you have offended a holy perfect God, on a regular basis I might ask, if you read Matthew 18:21-35, you'll see this servant who owes a fortune to their master, and their master forgives them. It's kind of like you and I owing the stimulus package, you know, multiple billions of dollars, to somebody else, and that person forgiving us, and then we're going to someone and say, "You know, you owe me ten bucks, and I'm not going to forgive that debt. I've been forgiven billions, but I'm going to hold out on you with ten dollars!" We do that, and we view people's offenses towards us as magnificent when really it's so small in comparison to how much God has forgiven us and that's where a passage like Ephesians 4:32 comes in. It says, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." How much have you been forgiven that allows you to wear this name tag, so that you can forgive someone else who sinned against you a much, much lesser amount. Show love, because you've been shown love and forgiveness.

And that gets to the summary of all of it. Love. "Beyond all of these things put on love." Don't ignore these things. It means, love, it looks like all these things. This is what it means to love. This is what your day in Christ is all about. This is who you are like. You need to love all these different ways: patience, compassion, kindness, goodness, because of who you are. And love, the text says, is the perfect bond of unity. God is really concerned about His people representing Him and being together as a group. Now, when we do this, we experience unity, togetherness, rather than division and hurt. But how do we do it? Well, we need to let the peace of Christ control us in our relationships. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. In fact, you are called in one body and be thankful. Paul says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." We've got to first notice what's doing the ruling, because something always rules in the heart. Something is always controlling your decisions. Something is always controlling if you do this, or if you do this. The Bible says that the peace of Christ is to rule or govern your decisions. The peace of Christ is something He gives to you, because of the status you now have with Him, because you are in Christ. If you look at Colossians 1:20, he says, "Through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross." He's made peace with us through the blood of the cross. So, that's Christ's peace that He's made, because He died on the cross for us. I am at peace with God. I have everything I need. He's on my side. I don't have to long for something else. And that can impact the way I get anxious about circumstances that I want to get peace from. What it means is that I have peace with God. I don't have to clamber after things that I think will bring me peace, because I already have it. Even though this sin cursed world oftentimes has trials and tribulations, I have peace with God that can control and govern how I think about difficult situations. I can let the peace of Christ God has placed me in govern or rule me in any given situation.

Well, what does this look like? It means that I don't have to be jealous for other people. It means that I don't have to think what they have I should have. My friend who got a new job who has all these great perks. Maybe a friend of yours' marriage looks so good, and everything works good for them, and they seem like they have the perfect marriage, and you're going through some difficulty. Maybe their family is growing, and you're not able to have a growing family. You're not in the same place. The peace of Christ can rule how you think of these situations, and we see that in our family, our church family, operating. When a couple who, maybe because of God's sovereignty, aren't able to have children cooks a meal for a couple with a new baby, and brings it over and delivers it to them, because inside they're hurting, but the peace of God is ruling in their hearts. They want to bless the body and rejoice with them, even though they're hurting. It's powerful to see people, even though they're hurting, have the peace of Christ rule and govern how they act and how they respond to situations.

On the flip side, it means that I don't have to be insensitive to your struggles. The peace of Christ can provide me comfort, so if your life is a little bit of chaos, I can move towards you rather than saying, "That's your bed. You made it. I'm not going to worry about it." The peace of Christ can help me not be insensitive. It can control my thinking. When the peace of Christ rules your heart, your boss's criticism can encourage you to improve rather than enrage you to bitterness. Your marriage, if your spouse isn't acting the way you'd prefer, you can respond with kindness, even when things don't go your way. Unity is the result. The psalmist writes, "How good and pleasant is it for brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity." That only happens if each of us lets the peace of Christ rule and govern our decisions. Sometimes, we're ruled by a lot of things that have nothing to do with the peace of Christ. When we lust or clamber after those things, it leads to a path of anger and bitterness and entitlement and division. It distracts us from glorifying God together as a body. Just think for a minute: what would it look like if our service, our nine thirty service, the peace of Christ would govern our thinking individually? There'd be a lot of people who are genuinely friendly, wanting to get to know new people, wanting to learn about other people's struggles, and trials, and difficulties, wanting to invite people to come and receive a blessing. You know, one of my heart's desire, as your pastor, is not that you would come to a service or an ABF because of a guilt trip, but because they saw it as a blessing to be there, and they wanted to be a blessing to others, because of the unity of the body that results when they are a blessing and they receive a blessing. That's why we need to be connected, not because of a guilt trip of attendance, but I want to be there to build up the body in love. That's why I want to be faithful to be part of the body, because that glorifies God, and that only comes from us letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

Well, how do we cultivate the mindset where the peace of Christ rules in our hearts? We must let the Word of Christ dominate our inner being. I love the idea of God's Word dominating our inner being. "Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Just as the peace of Christ is to rule our decision making of how I relate to people and circumstances, we're now

encouraged to let the Word of Christ richly dwell in us. I think it is reasonable that God expects us to know His Word. Wouldn't you say that God took great efforts to communicate and reveal Himself to us in His Word? He expects us to know His Word. Sunday morning services help you with that. Going to Adult Bible Fellowships helps you. Wednesday night, prayer men's groups, women's Bible studies, all those things are very valuable in learning God's Word. It's also important that each of us develop the habits of reading and meditating on God's Word for ourselves.

Many of us know a lot of truth or facts from the Bible. The question is, "To what degree does the truth of God's Word dominate my everyday living?" When is the last time, the last day, the Word of Christ dominated your day? What does that look like? Well, this is what it could look like. You wake up in the morning, and you do a devotional reading. You read the Word of God. You have a memory verse that you're working on throughout the day. You have some conflict with your spouse, or your kids, or a co-worker, and your mind goes to a truth from God's Word, or you actually go to open the Bible saying, "Honey, we're having some conflict. We need to go to God's Word." Maybe you share what you've been thinking about at the dinner table after work. Maybe you're led to prayer, because of something you've been meditating on regarding an attribute of God that you've learned that you haven't really thought enough about. And you thank the Lord in prayer for the Gospel, because you realize how holy He is, because you've been dominated by His Word, and you're so thankful for the Gospel of Christ. It dominates your day.

That's what it looks like for the Word for Christ to richly dwell within us. It needs to function, and operate, and dwell, and live, not just be stored temporarily and not used very often. It's the difference between having a guest for the weekend and somebody coming to live with you. Isn't there a difference? If your relatives are coming. Some of you have relatives, right? What if they just said, "Hey! We've moved in! We are here to stay!" Is that going to reorient your life? That's what it's like to have the Word of God richly dwell, to live, not just visit your heart. It's going to take much more focus and regular interaction. The Word of Christ is not a visitor, but sometimes that's how we treat it. The Word of Christ is to take up permanent residence, richly dwelling within you. That means, it needs ongoing attention. Your life needs to be oriented around it. Richly means it's deep. It's lasting. It's essential to your everyday life. The result is amazing. The result is wonderful. The result is that you will be able to wisely teach and encourage one another, building up the body in love, having unity in the body. When the Word of Christ dwells in you richly, it comes out of you. It overflows from you, because that's what makes up your thinking, and it comes out of you. Doesn't what you spend the time thinking about come out of you? If you're excited about your kid's ballet recital, you're excited about your child making the team, a soccer team, you talk about it! It comes out of you! You say, "This is cool! I want you to know about it!" If the Word of Christ is inside of you richly, it's going to come out of you.

Now, this might be challenging for all of us to hear, but the truth is we all will know what is saturating each other's lives, because it's going to come out of us at some point in time. If we spend enough time with each other, what is dominating our lives will come out of

us. And the text makes it very clear, if you're not ingesting the words of Christ, the words of Christ will not come out of you when life gets hard, when people disappoint you or hurt you, because you haven't been dominated by the Word of God. But if you are, joy and unity oftentimes is the result where you can gratefully celebrate with one another psalms, and songs, and spiritual songs, encouraging, and admonishing one another. I'm not talking about a celebration that just puts on a show, puts on an act, but I'm not talking about just being a stoic, where, you know, I don't get excited about anything. It's about being excited about the Word of God, because you have eyes to see God at work, because you've been reading about God who is at work, and you see it more clearly, and you're excited about what He's doing in life. If the peace of Christ rules your desires, and the Word of Christ dominates your everyday life, then you are now in a position to live for Christ in a comprehensive way, in a way that looks at the whole day of, "How can I live this day for Jesus because of who I am?"

That's what the very last phrase in our section talks about. It needs to affect our whole life, because, again, Christ is our life, therefore, we must seek to perform every action for Christ with thanksgiving. There is to be a joy that every opportunity is an opportunity to live in light of my namesake. And this is comprehensive. This is overwhelming. It's like, "God, I need your help to do this, but I have the peace of Christ that can rule me. I have your Word that can dominate me." Colossians 3:17 "Whatever you do in word or deed." Whatever! It's comprehensive! Everything! "Do all." Comprehensive! "In the," here's my name tag illustration, "in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

Friends, we are representing Christ. We have His name tag, His identity. That's one of the reasons He saved you, if that's your testimony. He was calling a group of people to be His possession, to be represented by His name, to show the glories of Jesus to the world. He's given you every spiritual blessing in Christ. He's transferred you from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His beloved Son. You were dead in your sins and trespasses, but now you've died with Christ, and you've been made alive in Him. God says, "Now, because of that, clothe yourself. Put on the righteousness of Christ. Let the peace of Christ rule your decision making, and be dominated by the Word of Christ, and be thankful for it." Three times the verse says, "Be thankful. Be thankful. Be thankful."

Here's your homework assignment, because I know you want homework. Are you thankful for that? How does my level of thankfulness indicate what name tag I wear on a regular basis? How does my level of thankfulness, because of the peace of Christ, because of the Word of Christ dominating my thinking, how does the thankfulness that I exhibit in my life indicate where I am finding my identity? Being a thankful person goes along with Christ's righteousness controlling your thinking and the Word of Christ dominating your mind, and then doing all things by God's strength because of your relationship with Him to the glory of God, because you are chosen, holy, and beloved. You are in Christ. Now, put Him on. That's our prayer, and that's how you continue to grow in loving God and loving others.

Let's pray and ask God to help us do just that.

*Lord, we're humbled and amazed that you would call us chosen, holy, and beloved. That You would give us Your name sake. You would view us as hidden in Christ, being one with Christ, being raised with Christ, being made alive with Christ. Lord, that is our identity. Lord, help us repent and forsake any other identity that we would seek to find our sense of satisfaction and worth in, but Lord, help us to think about how you view us in Christ. And then, Lord, help us to put on Christ in compassion, and humility, and gentleness, and kindness, and all these things that personify your Son. And Lord, help us love. Help us love as You love. And Lord, I pray we would do it in a thankful way, in a way that proclaims Your goodness and the goodness of Christ. Lord, help us do it even today and into the New Year. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*