

Pondering Christ in Colossians

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Well, hello, and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We are having a conversation about the Word of the Lord as it was preached to us on Sundays, and as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

I am here today, my name is Jack, I'm here with Tristan, Ben and Jono. We're talking about Christ in Colossians, and this is our 20th episode of Ponder, if I count correctly. Are we all excited today?

Very excited, yeah.

Psyched.

20 good achievement, 20 pods.

Well done.

Absolutely.

So Jono, we are reflecting on your sermon on Christ in Colossians. Do you want to give us a quick recap of that one?

Yeah, sure. What a great book. I tried to explore the tension between what Christ has done in his life, death and resurrection, and what believers need to do to appropriate what he offers in and through the gospel.

Reflections, Ben, Tristan, what did you guys take away from it?

Yeah, my reflection on Colossians and the sermon is, it's always a great passage on how the gospel instructs and works through the moral life of a Christian.

And out of all, I think it's 32 instructions up to verse 17, it's just so, it's not black and white, but it's also very direct in how you can go about living out those things. So, I enjoyed that.

Yeah, for me, it's one of those all time favorite passages on what the Christian life should look like. I love that relationship between the done of Jesus and then therefore the do after Jesus having done what He has done.

This is one that I've put to memory a long time ago, and I find really helpful to revisit all the time.

Yeah, fantastic. I think Colossians is such a rich book, as you said, and kind of reminds me of Ephesians a little bit.

In terms of you've got that really high sort of Christology stuff at the start, and then you switch into the practical stuff at the end.

So, Jono, one of the things you talked about, to start us off, is this idea of setting our hearts and minds on things above, which is drawing from the passage, and that was sort of your first point.

I just kind of wanted to get into the specifics a little bit. What are the things above that we want to focus on? Are we focusing on heaven?

Are we focusing on Jesus, on God, on us eventually getting to heaven? I just wanted to sort of drill down into that a bit.

Well, by this point in Colossians 3, Paul has spent two chapters talking about Christ, like that great passage in chapter 1, verses 15 to 20. The son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

It paints this absolutely cosmic picture of who Jesus is. So I think that is the things above. And then he tells us in chapter 3 to set our mind on that, on the person of Christ and how glorious and great he is.

And then there's also that contrast at the end of chapter 2, where he talks about not letting people judge you by merely human kind of rules and regulations, but lifting your eyes above the human level of things to Christ seated at the right hand of

God. I think that's at least part of what Paul is referring to by things above.

Surely it's a little about the kingdom. Like Jesus constantly talked about and taught about. The kingdom of heaven is like, the kingdom of God is like.

I think Paul's referring to that. What Ben just said, the cosmic authority, the grand, the grand juror, the preeminence of Christ in every way from Colossians 1.

But it's the kingdom, that which is of the world and the flesh is not helpful to focus your attention on. But we should be focusing our attention on God and His glorious kingdom, which is both in heaven and on earth as we pray.

May your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

And so thinking about setting our minds on that, setting our minds on the kingdom, I come into my Monday, Monday day, and I suddenly, I get all this clutter of work and the things I've got to focus on and my other commitments during the week, right?

How can we more steadily set our minds in the midst of the things that are competing for real estate in our minds?

I would say starting off, if you think of a lens, a lens filters what you're looking at. Like if you start your day, like four verse two, it's devote yourselves through prayer and thankfulness and instruction.

Like starting your day off in that devotion really sets you up well on a practical level on how to set yourself up for the day. That's what I always find helpful.

And if Christ is in the forefront of your mind throughout the day, yes, there's chaos and all these things that are trying to not distract you, but they just occupy space in your mind.

Like you said, once you start off your day well with Christ, it's always like the settler that just levels out everything else. And therefore, it's not overpowering your mind all the time.

It's, oh, I'm doing this through this lens that even if there's chaos, I'm still giving glory to God by doing those things well. So, yeah.

That kind of links in with what we were talking about with Galatians, about the daily practice of submitting everything to Christ and putting it at the foot of the cross.

Yeah.

Tristan, let's just talk about what that, on a really step-by-step basis, looks like, right? Does that mean in my morning, is that praying? Is that doing a specific reading?

Is there specific types of prayers that you think, or a specific type of practice, that I can start my morning off, that really sets the lens for the rest of the day?

I don't think you can go far from the Lord's Prayer, in terms of prayer, but it looks very different for very different people. Like, people have different routines, different ways they start their mornings.

And I think there's lots of resources that cater for those different needs. So you have a daily servants in our church, you have different devotional books, you have reading plans that are, there's a whole plethora of them.

So I think on a practical level, find what suits you, that caters for your needs, that you can maximize yourself in terms of how much input am I having to start off my day.

I wonder if it would be helpful if you gave examples of what works for you, Tristan, maybe Ben and Jono and you as well, if that's helpful.

Yeah, I got mine in my head. I love the Puritan readings and prayer books almost. So it's not really topical stuff.

It's just prayers on different themes. So I always find helpful if I really need a pick me up for the day. I just read one of those prayers, and then I pray afterwards, and it lights that fire for me in the morning.

So that's what I find helpful. It's called value of vision.

For me, it's a three-word prayer. Good morning, Lord. That's the first thing I say each morning.

I recently been getting up before my wife and daughter to have half an hour by myself with a coffee and with the Lord.

And the first thing I say is good morning, Lord, which what I am trying to do in saying that is waking myself up to the reality that God, my father, is with me right now.

That whatever this day holds, the busyness and the chaos and the pain and everything, I don't enter those things apart from the presence of God. And so it's sort of a way of starting the conversation of prayer.

And then I'll often read a passage of scripture, not a big passage and not a heavy study, but more of a kind of meditative devotional reflection on a short passage.

And the whole point of that is to set my mind and my heart on things above, because I wake up with my heart set on myself and my mind set on the things that I have coming up in my day.

And so it's a conscious decision to set your mind on things above. And I find that prayer and Bible reading in a kind of rhythmic way is helpful for me.

I've done lots of things over the years, but more recently, I'm pretty simple. I just focus on thanking God for another day, thanking God for His grace.

I'm a bit different, well, a lot different to most people, because a lot of my week, because I'm a full-time pastor, I'm in the Bible.

And so I don't tend to do so much early morning Bible reading because I know I'm going to be in the Bible most of the day, literally. So for me, it's really simple.

It's that the shape of the Lord's prayer, influencing how I interact with the Lord in a really practical way, just saying, thanks for your grace, thanks for the gospel and what it means to me today.

What's your rhythm, Jack?

Um, something I found helpful is like when I'm coming to prayer in the morning is actually like having a little notes document on my phone and writing down, well, thinking about, okay, what am I doing today?

And then writing down what I need prayer for in the coming day. So that sort of helps me to think about the day in advance and to give it to God and the specifics of it to God.

Um, now I usually pair that I have an Orthodox Church Study Bible, um, which has, it has pre-prepared prayers, but it also has, um, a weekly rhythm of, of morning Psalms and evening Psalms. And they're the same Psalms every week.

Um, but there's something about the rhythm of that, that, um, it can get stale sometimes and I've had to go off it because it just becomes too mechanical.

Um, but also there, you know, there's something to be said for repeating something week after week and then thinking about it in different contexts. Anyway, that's something that I, um, I found helpful.

One thing I would say, I guess, to encourage people listening is that when you're following the Lord over a long period of time, you go up and down and to the sides about how motivated you are, how fatigued you are. There's just a lot going on.

And I don't think most people just have a linear, beautiful rhythm that never changes. Or if you are the person that has that, good for you. That's your personality kicking in.

But for other people, it goes up and down. And I would just encourage people, if you're in that space, just keep clinging on to God. Try something new.

Do it with other people. Sometimes that's just a really helpful thing. Pray with others or meet with others.

It's this idea of, like you started off with, setting your mind and heart on things above. I think you can do that through a lot of different means. It's just shaping your posture towards God for the day.

CS.

Lewis talks about what he calls the law of undulation. Undulation is a weird word, but if you think about undulating hills, like hills that go up and then they go down again, and up and then you go down again.

And God has in some ways designed the spiritual life and the church life to have peaks and then valleys, and part of spiritual maturity is recognising that you're in that pattern, and that if you're in a valley, it's not the end of the world or the

end of your faith. It's just a season and you will go up to the hill again, and not being reliant on having the high all the time.

Turning now to your second point, Jono, about putting to death the things of sin. And we really got into some way form territory, which those of us who saw that sermon series would have remembered.

And you talked about, yet we need to repent of sin when we come to an awareness of it. And then you talked about some times we make these inner vows, with sin, that make it particularly resilient in our lives.

And that makes me think of the two Corinthians' idea of strongholds, which is language we've used. And you said, one of the ways we get rid of inner vows is just renounce it.

And just be really intentional in just speaking out loud, saying, I renounce this vow. I wanted to see, how can we identify these inner vows?

Because I think by their nature, sometimes they are subconscious, and we don't always realize that they are so deeply embedded. What are some ways we can identify them?

Having someone else process with you, who is gifted in listening to the Spirit and providing the wisdom the Spirit gives through giftedness and through revelation, is probably the main way that you break these things. But the simple way is ask God.

Just ask the Lord and then wait, and don't go to AI to cut the corner. As we've talked about last week, sit in the tension of what is it? What is it that's at the core of this?

Where was it? Where did this begin? And do the work.

Just do some processing, get your notepad out and start thinking about, you know, journaling and reflecting on where struggles with sin began. And it's profound, the power of reflecting with the spirit.

Probably our inner vows find us, in a sense. I heard once this idea of landmines, metaphorical landmines, that you're going through life, and then something happens, you make a comment, or somebody says something, and it just triggers you.

And you have an inordinate reaction to something that is just stronger than it should be. That's, I think, a signal that there's something deeper going on.

And so, that's when the stuff that you were saying, of processing with the spirit of God and with community, is helpful to think, why did that trigger me so much? Why was that a landmine for me?

My point is to pay attention to life as it happens to you, and reflect with God and with community.

I would say when you're in that wrestling match, of getting to grips with what that interval is, it's also really powerful to notice, or at least what I have found is that there's more underlying that original thing that you thought was the problem.

And there's a real power in what you were saying, Jono, to just renounce that and give it all to God and surrender that by saying, you know, this is your life, and it's, there's something really mysterious about how it just uncovers and unearths all

these different things that you didn't know were there in the first place. And yeah, I would say exactly what you two are saying. It's about just giving it all to him and that process, that wrestling match is so important to have.

It's not just being a doormat and letting this thing take over you. It's like fight, like fight for it.

And the way God has designed it to work, our growth in Christlikeness, is this golden triangle of spiritual formation. So you have the whole gospel on the top of the triangle. If you saw the sermon, you'd know what I'm talking about.

And then there are these holy habits, spiritual disciplines on the bottom right of the triangle. But the left bottom is trials, tribulations, suffering. And I think that's often really how you come face to face with inner vows.

You realize that life is not going so well, and you're struck by suffering, you're struck by the end of the road to ruin of sin.

And it's like the Prodigal Son, it's like he's in the pig's die, and he's like, I've sinned against heaven and against my father, and I'm in a terrible place.

And I think there was a profound sense of revelation about what he had done wrong to get there. So sometimes you need to experience the pain of sin to find out that you're sinning.

So suffering teaches us obedience, and suffering teaches us a lot of other stuff as well.

I want to shift now and talk about something you mentioned at the end of the sermon, Jono.

Throughout the sermon, there was this sort of dichotomy of what has been done for us and what we are to do.

And you quoted 2 Peter chapter 1, talking about the things we have to do, and we should do all of these sort of virtues to keep us from becoming ineffective and unproductive in our faith. I just wanted to dig in.

What does it mean, or what does it look like for us to be ineffective and unproductive? What is the sort of, if we could do a, I know you love to do a failure pre-mortem.

What does that end result look like, and what could we do to head in that direction? Not that we want to, but in order to avoid it.

I think coming back to the Colossians passage from 1 Peter, if you don't put to death anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, lying, if you don't put to death those things, they will bear fruit in your life.

And if you're not clothing yourselves with compassion, kindness, love, all these things, it will lead you to a situation of failure. So if we do a failure pre-mortem, which is like, what would I do to really ruin my life and be ineffective?

You do those things. So yeah, doing the very things that Paul says to put to death, you keep doing them, they will lead you to a place of ineffectual living. What does that look like?

I think your conscience is constantly bearing witness against you. And so it's very hard to live in, because we live, our behavior comes out of our identity.

So if our identity is constantly undermined by our lack of consistency in living the way that identity should be lived as a Christian, it just erodes our confidence that we are living in the freedom Christ died to give us.

And I think that that lack of confidence that what the Gospel promises is what I'm receiving leads to an ineffective life.

Not just because I feel like I'm ineffective, but literally, I'm not walking in the power of the Spirit, I'm walking in the power of the flesh, and that's just not as powerful. It's ineffective.

In some ways, you're almost making the work of the Spirit and the sacrifice of Christ ineffective in your life, because it is not being given the chance to breathe.

And that's the word to appropriate what has been made available. It's just a different way to say, becoming a person who is effective in the kingdom.

I think of John 15, Jesus talks about him being the vine and we are the branches. And he says, if you remain in me and my words remain in you, then you will bear much fruit, but apart from me, you can do nothing.

And so that, you know, you can do nothing. That is what it means to be ineffective and unproductive in faith.

But I think it was, I mean, Dad always says, I think Willard said it first, that if you are doing nothing, it is because you are not abiding in Christ. So the logic works the other way. If you are not in Christ, you will do nothing.

If you are doing nothing, it is because you are not in Christ. But this image of appropriating the righteousness of Christ, abiding in the vine, we will bear fruit. That is the promise of Scripture.

Galatians 5 says, the acts of the flesh are obvious, and then a list of all the things that you can imagine. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

And so that is an effective and productive Christian, where the Spirit of God is bringing to bear the fruit of the Spirit in their life. And it comes from abiding in Christ, in John 15.

Switching gears a little bit.

Jono, there are a couple of points in the sermon where you highlighted parts of Colossians that are good for memorizing and treasuring up in your heart. And, I mean, Colossians is so full of good stuff.

But I had a conversation last night with someone who's talking about their struggles with memorization. And it's something I've felt as well.

Like, partly there's so much scripture that I feel like, oh, I should memorize this, I should memorize this, I should memorize this. There can be a sort of a burden to think, oh, to be a good Christian, I need to do all this memorization.

So, I'm asking you guys to respond to that. And also, what are some tips and helpful things you can offer to people when it comes to scriptural memorization?

The first thing is the good news to let go of that burden. You don't have to memorize the whole Bible. Start with one passage.

So, any time that there's guilt around, oh my gosh, I can't memorize all of Colossians, let that burden fall gladly off your shoulders. Jesus says in Matthew 11, come to me, all you who were weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

He talks about this light burden. So, any time you're carrying a heavy burden, it's not the burden of Christ. So firstly, let go of that burden.

Start small. This is maybe some of the wisdom that habit psychology gives us. Of memorize one verse, and then maybe add a second verse to that, and build up from there.

A key for me is having fun.

Enjoying it. Just enjoying it. It's not a burden as Ben just said.

It's just, it's cool. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. I know it from the old version.

It teaches us, so cool. The grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions that live self-controlled, upright, godly lives.

While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem for himself, for people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

That preaches, and you've got to enjoy it, sort of have fun with it. Because it's full of truth. It's full of truth.

There's actually power. And it's actually like literally warfare. Like it's wielding the sword of the spirit.

That's what it is. Like when Paul talks about in Ephesians 6, the spiritual armor and to wield the sword of the spirit, it's that. David said, I have hidden God's word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

It's enjoyable. It's like training. Training, physical training, you know.

At the start, it's hard, but you just have to keep doing it and you get a few wins. And you start to go, oh, I've got that. But one verse at a time.

That's good.

I remember you saying that many times over the years in reflecting on the sword of the spirit, that if you're not memorizing scripture, you go to reach for the sword and it's not there. And you think, oh, the temptation comes.

There's a really good Bible verse that addresses this situation, but I don't have it. And so you're missing that sword.

You can't pull the sword from someone else's scabbard.

Yeah. You got to hide the word.

And the other thing I was going to say is Psalm 1 says, blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, who meditates on

his law day and night. So that's a crucial verse, literally the first Psalm of the Book of 150 Psalms, that talks about the flourishing life that comes from meditating on his word day and night.

And I think there's no better way of doing that than by scripture memorization, hiding his word in our heart, as Psalm 119 says.

People a lot more wise and godly than us have said, reading the Bible through all the way is good to do at least once. But far more, far more powerful is scripture memorization. It's actually something you got to learn, get onto.

Yeah, if it's hard, it's like, okay, I've realized what the hard thing is that I want to do. Do hard things. It's worth it.

It may be one of the more important things you could ever do in Christian living. Stow the word of God away in your heart.

I'm halfway through memorizing the Sermon on the Mount. I feel like I talk about it so much that I should hide it in my heart. And that's been really helpful to be able to pull out verses from the first half of the sermon.

When I need it, and I need it a lot, because it's such a crucial passage of scripture.

It's just such a simple project. One of the hard things is people, they don't know where to start with Christianity. And especially if you've been a Christian for a while, it's like, I don't know, what do I do now?

Just pick some, Romans 8, 1-8, classic one to try to memorize. The 23rd Psalm, the Lord's Prayer, that passage, Matthew 11, about the easy yoke. So important.

But that's just it, isn't it?

It's about doing it like we've been looking at. Just start it. And there's multiple avenues of doing that, where it's make it personal.

If it's your favorite Bible passage or if it's like something that means a lot to you, it's much easier to remember it if there's a connection to it.

And also, if you're not that type of brainwave where you're just reading the passage over and over again and it's not going in, at least meditate on it and apply it.

Like I always find, I find the application in things and then I find the verses later and I remember or through the application, I remember the verse. So it's always helpful to like what you say, just start.

Like it's about, it's a real spiritual discipline that is super helpful. So yeah.

If you want a practical tool, there's an app called Fighter Verses that you can put in any Bible verse and it will give it to you in a bunch of different ways to help you memorize it.

Like keywords will be missing and you have to put in what the word is. And then it gets harder and harder until it gives nothing and you have to memorize the whole thing.

Just a really helpful, almost gamified way of memorizing scripture, which could be more helpful than sitting in front of a page and reading it.

And you have to pick what translation you're going to stick with. It's very difficult if you are trying different translations. Just pick one and sort of try to lock that away.

Another thing I found helpful when we were speaking about prayer earlier, if you pray scripture, like if you pray certain parts of the Psalms, I always found it helpful that it sticks.

If you prayed a couple of times, it sticks. So I think praying through scripture is also a very, very helpful way to memorize scripture.

It's interesting that early on in Colossians, Paul writes, We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord.

So this understanding of scripture is so essential to live that life that we were talking about that's not ineffective, but worthy of the Lord.

Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

I think as you were saying, Tristan, you should start with things that are just genuinely helpful for you, passages that are meaning for you and that if you struggle with it, find a passage that helps with whatever struggle you're going through.

And just start with that because it's just useful for you. Don't feel like you, yeah, it's a long list of to-dos. Focus on how it's helpful for you.

All right. Well, I think we'll call it there and move to our palette cleanser question. And stay thinking about things that have been done for us versus the things we have to do.

I was thinking, what is a chore or a task that you, if you could choose, would always be done for you, that you wouldn't have to do, if that makes sense.

For me, it's mowing the lawn. That's dad's department. That's all him.

Cause if I know how to do it, it's just, it won't be done correctly. Even if I do it right, he's still going to go over it and make sure the lines are like Wembley's lawn. So for me, it's mowing the lawn.

That's so funny.

That's my favorite job. I love anything in the garden. I love it.

That's true.

Jono and Ben just love to work.

I must say cleaning poopy nappies of my nine-month-old daughter is a very necessary job, but it's not my favorite job. I can deal with the wee nappies, but the poopy nappies, nine months in, they still get me.

Sometimes it's brutal, but that's the love of a father for his daughter and for his wife as well.

I think for me, it would be after you're going on a holidays and coming back, you get home, unpacking all of the luggage, taking it from the car, and then putting all the clothes back. I hate that so much because I just want to collapse into bed.

So, I would love to have a valet that just does that for me. Jono's coming up blank. Jono's coming up blank.

Pals.

Well, in that case, I think we'll call it there.

Thank you all for listening. And I hope this podcast has been helpful for you. And I hope that this week, you can set your mind on things above and that that would be transformative for you and that you would live in the kingdom.