

Colossians 1:1—14

Sept. 8, 2019

Imagine going to the theatre to take in a play and instead of being a passive audience member, you are recruited to be an active part of the production. You do not sit and watch, you stand and participate.

It is a thing. It is called Immersive theatre. The phenomena is popular in England. Listen to how a British publication describes immersive theatre:

Anna Savoy describes the experience,

“You’ve gone for a night at the theatre. Tickets presented, coats deposited and you’re ready to take your seat in the auditorium... Instead, you’re herded into a room... you and the rest of the audience are sorted into groups and welcomed into a labyrinthine series of sets which form the stage. You are literally in the play, straddling the gap between audience and extra. You’ve been immersed in the world of immersive theatre.

Immersive theatre has seen a huge surge in popularity in the past decade. Once the preserve of visionary ...it’s now almost a theatrical mainstay.

Part of the enduring, and growing, appeal is just this: the experience, good or bad, revolves around you. The viewer is no longer passive in immersive theatre. They are at the center of the action, and that is very much what a new generation of theatregoers are looking for.”

The book we embark on today is going to be akin to an exercise in immersive theatre. Colossians beckons us not to sit on the side passively watching life, but actively participating in this life with Jesus.

We readers are to experience this immersion together.

Unlike immersive theatre, the action does not all revolve around us, instead our goal is to see to put Jesus at the Center of all we do and all we are.

When we fix ourselves on Jesus we will be immersed in the action.

Wherever you are—whatever you are facing—whoever you are—however you are—this book is not for us to passively take in but to

immerse ourselves in. It is not so much that you and I are the center of the action, but we find that Jesus is at the center of all things and we take our place next to him.

All of us need to fix ourselves on Jesus. You need to fix yourself on Jesus—

- Bored?: Maybe for you, life just continues to unspool day after day after day and the whole dance is getting old. I invite you to fix yourself on Jesus and come alive to a sense of purpose in you that you have never known.

Fix yourself on Jesus.

- Disappointed?: Perhaps you are just disappointed. Nothing about you or your life has turned out like you thought. Your life seems to lack all color or excitement. I invite you to fix yourself on Jesus who is incapable of disappointing you.

Fix yourself on Jesus.

- Weary? : No sleep give you rest. You feel like you are climbing a staircase with no end. Just one step after another and you can see know way out. I invite you to fix yourself on Jesus who gives rest to the weary.

Fix yourself on Jesus.

- Doing okay?: Perhaps nothing is great or amazing, but things are fine. You are comfortable not getting too high or low and your routine comforts you. I invite you to fix yourself on Jesus who offers something much better than okayness.

Fix yourself on Jesus.

- Suffering?: Maybe the hot winds of affliction are blowing and battering against you. And you can't seem to find any shelter. I invite you to fix yourself on Jesus and he can be protect you even in the valley of the shadow of death.

Fix yourself on Jesus.

- Aimless?: Perhaps you just don't know what should be next for you. If you had to put words to it, you might just say that you

are wandering randomly through life. I invite you to fix yourself on Jesus and find solid direction.

Fix yourself on Jesus.

- Afraid?: Possibly you are facing something terrifying or you are just always tempted toward fear. You live constantly afraid of what will happen next. What is out there lurking for me? I invite you to fix yourself on Jesus and his strength in any circumstance.

Fix yourself on Jesus.

- Hassled?: You need 26 hours in a day. You are so busy and life keeps badgering you as you chase after the kids, job, school and you don't have time to be sitting here right now! I invite you to fix yourself on Jesus and his peace.

Fix yourself on Jesus.

- Numb?: Maybe you don't feel anything anymore and that is just how you like it. You can't imagine making yourself vulnerable to anyone, much less God. Invite you to fix yourself on Jesus and the safety he provides.

Fix yourself on Jesus.

Our first opportunity for immersion comes as we look at Colossians 1:1-14. If I were to summarize the purpose of this passage—or the way that we are to fix ourselves on Jesus—

PROP: We who have faith in Jesus must do all we can to please Jesus.

Who doesn't want to live a life that pleases the Lord? I do? Is there any true Christian who doesn't care what Jesus thinks?

No.

Let's fix ourselves on Jesus together.

Colossians was written by a man named Paul from a Roman prison to a church in modern day Turkey in a town called Colossae.

The letter is ancient, but the sentiment is not.

“ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

[2] To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

[3] We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, [4] since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, [5] because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, [6] which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, [7] just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf [8] and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

[9] And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [10] so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; [11] being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; [12] giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. [13] He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, [14] in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:1–14

PRAY

He worked in you; you walk in him.

Paul wrote to this ancient church in the long ago city of Colosse, but it is as if he is writing today.

Continually Thankful
Constantly Appealing

1. Continually Thankful (Colossians 1:1-8)

Notice carefully what Paul tells the church he is grateful for—

Vs. 3,

[3] We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, [4] since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,

Paul is grateful NOT primarily for THEM but in what God has DONE in them. See that?

We heard of your faith in Jesus and the love you have for others and that presses us to thank God. The clear implication is that our salvation says much more about what God has done than about the faith we exert in God.

I'm glad for that.

If my eternal destiny hung on how much or how well I believed in Jesus—I'd be in a world of hurt. Our destiny is secured not by the strength of our faith but the grace of our God.

Paul is specifically grateful for God's handiwork in them in two specific ways. Did you notice them both? He is grateful for:

- Your faith in Christ Jesus
- And the love for all the saints

Make no mistake faith in Jesus is a work of God. It is miraculous for sinners to believe that Jesus is worth trusting over and against and contrary to ourselves. That is a miraculous work of God.

Did you put faith in Jesus? Yes. To be sure. But your faith is never as important as the one you have faith in. As Jesus your savior.

"If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic, he would have sent an economist. If he had perceived that our greatest need was entertainment, he would have sent us a comedian or an artist. If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, he would have sent us a politician. If he had perceived that our greatest need was health, he would have sent us a doctor. But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death; and he sent us a Savior." D.A. Carson

The love for all the saints is what faith in Jesus looks like. This is no character trait but a miracle of grace. Caring and loving others more than ourselves is not something that comes naturally—it is the supernatural working of God.

What wrought these tectonic shifts in the church of Colosse? Or in us?

Was it hard work?
Was it robust obedience?
Was it religious observance?
Was it doing more good than bad?
Was it trying to be better?

Nope.

Vs. 5,

because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

The gospel. The news of Jesus and his death, burial and resurrection. That is the news that God has opened a way to dodge death and save any who trust in Jesus. The gospel news must be heard and believed and then it transforms. Because the gospel is the very power of God.

The gospel—this word of hope—is the message that Jesus has come to save any of the unworthy, the spiteful, the hateful, the cowardly, the vile, the ungodly, the dirty, the foul-mouthed willing to turn to him.

That is the message that they had received. That is the message we have received. That very gospel was bearing fruit and increasing in them and in you.

The gospel is how Jesus worked. The gospel is how Jesus continues to work.

That forms the substance of Paul's continual thankfulness—

2. Constantly Appealing (Col. 1:9-14)

What is the first step in pleasing the Lord? Finding his will for our lives.

Look at verse 9.

Vs. 9,

[9] And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Of all things he constantly prays for them he prays that they would be filled with a knowledge of his will for them. That sounds great.

When we talk about the will of God, we can often talk about it with reference to big-life altering decisions.

Is it God's will:

To be single?

To marry?

If so, who?

To go to that school?

To take that job?

To live in that apartment?

How many kids should we have?

Should I change careers?

This is how we often talk about the will of God but would it surprise you that the scriptures nearly never talk about God's will like that? It is not wrong—but that kind of talk doesn't reflect the emphasis of scripture.

To know God's will means that you know how to live moment by moment. Life has a mundane rhythm and you can think that these small things don't really matter.

False. You need nothing less than to be filled with the knowledge of God's will just to make it day to day.

We need to be filled with the knowledge of his will NOT just for the big decisions, but for the daily decisions. If we aren't filled with his will for these decisions, we are in trouble.

Why does pray for them to be filled with the knowledge of the will of God?

Vs. 10

'so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him...'

The Christian life is described as a walk not a flight not a car race, not teleportation. Your need to be filled with the knowledge of his will just to be able to take the right next step in your life.

Do you see what he is praying for?

That they might live in such a way that please the lord with every step. That is our great purpose. I can tell you we will not achieve that purpose if we are not filled with the knowledge of his will.

How are we supposed to do that?

Rather, the right question is—what does it look like to live a life worthy of the Lord and fully please him? What does that kind of life look like?

The answer is that you just keep reading. Paul lists four things that typify those who are full of the knowledge of God.

Here is how to please the Lord.

1. Bearing fruit in every good work

What is God's will for you? That you give yourself constantly and tirelessly to good works. What kind? Every kind.

Way back in Genesis 1, God told Adam to bear fruit and multiply throughout the earth. Instead, he failed and spread sin and death the world over. He turned from the Lord his loving creator and filled the land with sorrow and disappointment.

But now, God is building a new humanity through the gospel. And that people of whom we are a part are called to be about good works.

What is God's will for your life?

That you and I give ourselves to good works.

None of us are saved by good works but we all must be convinced that we are saved to do good works for the fame and name of the Lord.

Does his good work in you cause you to do good works for others? That is God's will for you.

What kind of good works?

- Be compassionate toward the deserving and undeserving alike.
- Be kind to all without exception.
- Overlook sin committed against you.
- Love everyone without regard to whether they deserve it.
- Sacrifice your time and comfort for the good of someone else.
- Forgiving others whether they ask for it or not.
- Using your tongue to build up and encourage and not divide and tear down.
- Constantly praying for people in your life.
- Serving in areas of need.
- Serving in areas of gifting.
- Serving others in secret.
- Encouraging the downtrodden.
- Weeping with the weeping.
- Protecting the weak.
- Sacrificial giving.

What is God's will for your life? To bear fruit in works like those and so many more.

How are we to please the Lord?

God's will for your life is to do good works and bear fruit. What else is God's will for your life?

2. Increasing in the knowledge of God

Vs. 10, 'increasing in the knowledge of God'

This does not mean that we need to learn more facts about God. It is good to be acquainted with the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God. It is good to understand the aseity, immutability and authority of God.

That is good, but that is not what Paul is talking about when he says that the will of God for your life is that you increase in the knowledge of God—

It means that your experience with God as your faithful father continues to transform who you are. The knowing here is a knowing over time. Something like, I've walked with God for years and I know he is faithful. I can trust him.

When you continue to follow God through many dangers, toils and snares you grow in the knowledge of him. When you go through something tough, you know something else of God and his faithfulness toward you.

You know the story of Job in the OT. He lost all his children, all his possessions, all his money, everything. He had rotten friends that did not provide much solace. It was quite an ordeal.

By the end he realized that the Lord sustained him through all of it.

He said to the Lord,

[2] "I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
[3] 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
[4] 'Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.'
[5] I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you; Job 42:2-5

Hear that? I knew about you, but as you walked with me through this ordeal I have seen you work in me.

What is God's will for your life? That you would increase in the knowledge of God.

What is his will?

- That when you know discouragement, you know your God who sustains you.
- That when you fall down, you know your God who picks you up.

- That when you fail, you know the God who always forgives.
- That when you run from God, that you know he always welcomes you home.
- That when you look back on your life after 2, 3, 4, decades you can say, "I've known the Lord."

That is increasing in the knowledge of God.

What is his will for you? How do you please the Lord?

That you would:

- Bear fruit in every good work
- Increase in the knowledge of God

And that you would be,

3. Strengthened with all power

Did you see that in verse 11?

[11] being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might,

Now we are talking! Power for what?

To overcome any obstacle?
 To devastate our foes?
 To tear down strongholds?
 To perform miracles?
 To conquer?

Here is what the power is for--

being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might,
 for all endurance and patience with joy;

To endure and to be patient.

Do you know how much that helps me? Sometimes I can think why is life so darn hard? This is difficult. Paul tells that life is that hard and we need nothing less than the power of God according to his glorious might just to endure and to be patient in the face of people who oppose us.

Patience here means having a disposition of longsuffering toward people who are against us.

Notice also we are not invited to strengthen ourselves but he is the one who strengthens.

You need God's power NOT to quit.
You need God's power to be patient toward those against you.

What is God's will for you?

To get power to endure.
To get patience to be longsuffering.

Oh. And one more thing.

How?

Vs. [11] being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

Joy!

Tell me you don't have to be fixed on Jesus for all that.

The only way we can be joyful and endure with longsuffering is by taking our eyes off our circumstances and fix them on Jesus. Don't misunderstand, this does not mean that we should be happy when the wheels fall off in an area of our lives, but rather it means our joy is found in Jesus and not what happens to us.

Do you see?

Christians are not to visit the land of make-believe during times of affliction, pretending that they don't hurt and all is fine.

No.

We are strengthened with divine power according to his might to endure with JOY

Because Jesus is better beyond all compare.

If that doesn't make sense. Hang in there in this book. Better, fix yourself on Jesus.

When you purpose to please Jesus and fix your mind on him, joy will be easier to come by.

What is God's will for you? How can we please the Lord?

Bearing fruit in every good work.
Growing in the knowledge of God.
Strength to endure with longsuffering.

We also please the Lord by

4. Giving thanks to the Father

Continually Giving thanks. I am much more adept to find things to complain about. That comes much more naturally.

The will of God is for us to be like a explorers, traveling through life with scripture as our guide, constantly looking for things to be thankful for. It is so much more natural to find things to complain about.

This is a discipline.

What can we be thankful for? An inheritance with the saints of light.

- We are not treated as our sins deserve.
- Not now and not ever.
- God loves us not because we are lovable.
- God is always on our side.
- Nothing, NOTHING can separate us from the love of Christ.
- God gives us all we need.
- God promises that he will work through all things for our good.
- That these light and momentary afflictions are not worth comparing the glory that is to be ours.
- Eternal life. Forever with Jesus.
- No more pain. No more sadness.

Do you see?

How do we please the Lord?

- Bear fruit in good works.
- Grow in the knowledge of God.

- Strengthened with his power.
- Continually give thanks.

In other words, the will of God for all of us is to fix ourselves on Jesus.

His will is NOT probably for you to—

- Quit your job
- Uproot everything
- Strike out on an expedition to find his will.

The knowledge of his will comes when we take hold of normal, natural moments and there live to please God.

That is his will.

PRAY.

[9] And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [10] so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; [11] being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; [12] giving thanks to the Father...

