Stay Don't Stray

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[0:00] Let's read from Colossians chapter 2, verses 1-7. This is Paul's letter to the Colossians, verses 1-7.

! This is Paul's letter to the Colossians, verses 1-7. And we read this, For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments, for though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.
Therefore, as you received Christ, Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.
This is God's holy word. We turn this evening to Colossians chapter 2 and the first seven verses, that passage that Corey read for us.
[1:33] Stay, don't stray. It's actually the name of a stay-put primer for concealers and eyeshadows.

The advertising blurb says, this dual action power primer works 360 degrees around the eyes to make concealers and eyeshadows stay put.
Concealers don't crease, eyeshadows stay vibrant and true. Well, my knowledge of female cosmetic products is, I am sure you will be glad to know, fairly limited.
In fact, it's practically non-existent. But what I can gather from stay, don't stray is that it's something applied to the skin to make sure that what is put on next stays put.
I imagine it to be some kind of cream or glue that keeps your eyeliner in the right place and stops it running and spoiling the effect.
[2:45] I'm glad I've shared that with you this evening. Well, by now you are wondering if I've lost my mind. What on earth am I doing speaking about a particular type of makeup?

But it's this idea of stay, don't stray that I think helpfully sums up the message of Paul's letter to the Colossians.
Paul is writing to remind these Christian believers that all they need to grow and mature as Christians is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.
They don't need to look elsewhere. They need to keep their focus on Jesus. He needs to be at the center. They need to stay and stick with Him.
And in many ways, this was the burden of Paul's work as an apostle and as a servant of Christ. He longed to see men and women come into a relationship with Jesus and find in Him their rest and their salvation.
[3:54] And even though in one sense the Colossian believers and those at Laodicea were strangers to him, nonetheless, Paul struggled or agonized in prayer for them.

He longed to see them grow and mature. And as we noted last week, this is the great aim, really, of pastoral ministry, to present everyone mature in Christ.
Paul writes here, I want you to know the struggle I have for you and those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
Of course, as we know, there were those in and around the Colossian church that had a very different message to the Apostle Paul. Paul says in verse 4, I say this in order that no one may

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delude you with plausible arguments.
For though I am absent in body, I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. These other teachers promoted a wisdom and a knowledge apart from or supplemental to the Lord Jesus Christ.
[5:28] Their arguments were indeed plausible. They had a lot of fine words, a lot of high-sounding phrases rolled off their tongues. They spoke of spiritual fullness and abundance.

They pandered to people's pride and sense of insecurity. They offered secret knowledge and enlightenment. But Paul wanted the Colossians to stay with Christ and not move away from Him. He wanted them to remain secure in the apostolic gospel. He wanted them to keep Jesus firmly at the center. Because Christ is all that His people need.
He is enough. In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And so, what we have in the verses that follow is Paul's exhortation to the Colossians.
And one writer calls it a concise summary of the whole letter. How are they going to move forward in faith and grow to maturity? How are they going to stay, not stray?
[6:36] Well, we have it in verses 6 and 7. Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

And it's really upon these verses that I want to land for a moment this evening. Because as I've said, these verses kind of sum up, encapsulate the message of the whole letter.
Build your life on Jesus Christ. Here is Paul revealing to us the way of growth and maturity in the Christian life.
How can we remain close to Jesus, even in a world where there are so many different voices clamoring for our attention? Here is how we too can stay, not stray.
These words are applicable to us as individuals. I think they're also applicable to us as a church. As God's people, we must continue to press on towards growth and maturity in Christ.
[7:48] So let me summarize these verses under three brief headings, three key elements of Christian life and growth. Three words, as it were.

The first word is the word, it is actually a word, I haven't actually made it up, relentlessness. There's a relentlessness about Christian life and growth.
Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. Sometimes we say, don't we, start as you mean to go on.
Here Paul says, go on as you started. Keep going in the same way that you began the Christian life. So how did the Christian life begin for the Colossians?
Paul puts it very simply, very clearly. They received Christ Jesus the Lord. The word that Paul uses here for receiving Christ is a Greek word, paralambano.
[8:53] And it sounds like something that might be performed on Strictly Come Dancing. But no, it is not an exotic Latin American dance. The word is related to this idea of receiving a tradition from others.

So what Paul is writing about here is more than just a subjective experience of receiving Christ into one's heart by the power of the Spirit. It's also about receiving the tradition or the teaching of the gospel.
And you might recall that Paul writes about that gospel tradition, famously, 1 Corinthians 15. I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.
So receiving Christ Jesus, the Lord, involves both receiving the apostolic teaching about Jesus, that is the gospel, and believing it, as well as this heart submission to Jesus Christ as Lord.
We receive the teaching about Him, who He is, what He has done in His life, death, and resurrection, as well as a personal union with Christ.
[10:15] Christ in us, the hope of glory. These two things really go together. Receiving Christ into our lives involves both doctrine and experience.

The gospel that is preached and proclaimed is all about the Lord Jesus Christ. The one that we receive into our lives is none other than that self-same Jesus, the very Son of God.
So becoming a Christian involves us believing certain things about Jesus, but more than that, it involves Him coming to live within us by His Spirit.

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The gospel, we've said this before, is not just about receiving kind of happiness, nice feelings, joy, and peace. It's all about receiving the Lord Jesus Christ.
When people receive the gospel, they receive Him. To become a Christian is to receive Jesus Christ into your life. It is for Christ to come and live within you.
[11:20] That's how the New Testament speaks, isn't it? It's no longer I that live, says Paul, but Christ that lives within me. And this Jesus that we receive is not one of our own making.

It's not a fantasy of our own thinking. He is Christ Jesus, the Lord. We receive Him. not just the parts that we like or we're drawn to.
We don't get to pick and choose. Sometimes, when I was younger, I used to hear people say things like, oh, I accepted Jesus as my Savior, but not as Lord.
And what they often believed by that was that they could have all their sins forgiven and then, you know, could just live any way we please. as if Jesus could be divided or separated.
But Jesus Christ is always Savior and Lord. Christ and all His benefits come together. Calvin writes, the whole gospel is contained in Christ.
[12:31] It's all wrapped up in Him. He's at the center of it all. The Christian faith is not centered, really, on ethics or morality or philosophy. It's centered on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, what Paul is saying here is that in the same way as you receive Jesus, so you are to continue in the Christian life. Walk in Him. Live in union with Jesus through faith in the gospel.
You've been brought into a relationship with Jesus Christ. You have received Him, so don't deviate from that path. Don't change direction or switch to some other pattern or way of living.
Don't be listening to other voices. The Christian life begins and continues with faith and trust in Jesus. It's all rooted in Him.
Press on with Jesus. Keep on with Him. There is, you see, this relentlessness to Christian growth and maturity. It's a long obedience in the same direction.
[13:34] It's traveling with Jesus every day. As you receive Him, so go on with Him. Stick with Jesus. Be relentless in your fellowship with Him.

And that's something that Jesus Himself spoke about with His disciples. Corrie read those verses as our invitation to worship. Abide in Me and I in you.
As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, He it is that bears much fruit.
For apart from Me, you can do nothing. How do we grow and become productive as Christians? We abide or remain in the vine.
We remain in a relationship with Jesus. We need to rest in and depend upon the Lord Jesus Christ at all times.
[14:38] There's an old Anglican prayer that says, Without thee, we are not able to please thee. We need to be relentless in this regard.

We mustn't wander off. We need to stay, not stray. We must continue in Him, walking in Him, staying with Him and holding onto Him by faith alone.
There's a relentlessness here about Christian growth. And that brings me to the second word here, steadfastness. There is a steadfastness about Christian life and growth.
Look at what Paul says here, Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith just as you were taught.
So, Paul uses three separate metaphors to make this point. Rooted, built up, established, all related to this concept of stability.
[15:48] To grow, there must be stability. Without it, any growth may prove temporary or short-lived. And the metaphors he uses are drawn from the worlds of agriculture and architecture.

He speaks of being rooted like a plant in the rich soil of Jesus Christ. A tree or plant does not flourish without being properly rooted and grounded in the soil.
He then speaks of being built up in Christ and established in the faith. Here is something that is growing and being added to, and yet in order for that to happen effectively, foundations need to be established.
In order for the plant to grow up, it needs roots to be put down. In order for the structure to be built up, the foundations have to be dug down. How true it is that in the Christian life, the only way up is down.

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to grow up, you have to dig down. Down into Christ, down into the grace of God, down into the fertile soil of the gospel, down into the bedrock of God's unchanging character.
[17:01] Proper roots and foundations are vital because it's these that give our lives stability and growth. If we are to grow and be built up, we need to be established in the faith.

And when Paul mentions faith here, he's not referring to our action of trust and dependence on Christ. Crowley was speaking about that this morning.
He's talking about the faith. That is the apostolic teaching. Jude in his letter speaks of the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.
According to the New Testament, there is a body of truth that we can call the Christian faith. Luke, Acts 6, verse 7, And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.
Paul writes, Galatians 1.23, They only were hearing it said, He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith. He once tried to destroy.
[18:16] From the outset of the Christian church, there has always been a recognizable, defensible gospel. There are things that are true and false about Christianity. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is only one gospel. There is only one Christ. There is only one Savior. And stability and growth only come as we are established in Him and in this faith.
And that's why we prize teaching highly in the church. Paul says, just as you were taught, the faith must be taught.
I remember many years ago being at a conference where Dr. Jim Packer, Anglican theologian, was the speaker. And at the end there was an opportunity for questions.
I was very young and so I plucked up the courage to ask him a question. And usually he asks some kind of really difficult question. So I said, I asked him what he thought the greatest need of the church was in our day and generation.
[19:29] That was my question to him. And without hesitating, he said this, to teach the gospel. That was his response. Teach the gospel. For God's people to grow, there must be the teaching of the gospel.

All the treasures of knowledge and wisdom hidden in Christ are to be unpacked. We need to know the faith, or we will become prey to those who peddle falsehood and error.
Mark Johnston, in his banner of truth commentary, shares the story of a friend who saw in his congregation, many in his congregation, delivered from a false gospel without actually having to directly criticize those who had taught it, their previous minister and others in the congregation.
And when he asked his friend how he had managed to do this, his friend simply said this, if you want to show a line as crooked, just draw a straight line beside it.
And that's what Paul is telling us here. The gospel is our straight line. And the word of Christ, the gospel, is vital to the health and well-being of churches and Christians because Jesus Christ himself is the very source of spiritual life and vitality.
[20:53] The problems and anxieties and difficulties we all experience in this life have, at the end of the day, their answer in him. Our great need is to know him better, to come to love him more.

And so tonight you may be weighed down with the burden of your sins. Well, Jesus is the great burden-bearer. Maybe you're facing death. He's the firstborn from the dead.
Are you weak? Christ is strong. Are we foolish? He is the wisdom of God. Are we in the dark? He's the very light of the world. Are we lost?
He is the way. Are we tired and exhausted and weary? He is our rest. Are our lives stained with guilt?
His blood makes the foulest clean. Of course, you do sometimes hear people say that Christianity is better caught than taught.
[21:58] Or as we say here in Scotland, better felt than telt. But it is a very dangerous thing to pit doctrine and experience against one another, because Christianity is both felt and telt.

It's both caught and taught. Christianity that is all feelings, emotions, and experience will not long survive in this harsh and sometimes difficult world.
And likewise, a Christianity that is purely cerebral, dominated only by head knowledge, will become dry and arid and stale.

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Martin Lloyd Jones wrote these words, to be a Christian is not only to believe the teaching of Christ and to practice it, it's not only to try to follow the pattern and example of Christ, Christ.
It is to be so vitally related to Christ that His life and His power are working in us. It is to be in Christ.
[23:07] It is for Christ to be in us. So, Christian stability needs both doctrine and experience. They go together.

a long time ago when I was in the Boys' Brigade, that is a uniformed Christian organization established in 1883 by Sir William Alexander Smith in Glasgow.
That's for those of you who are not in Scotland or Northern Ireland or England. England, and in the Boys' Brigade, the badge is an anchor.
And we would sometimes sing a song based on the brigade motto drawn from Hebrews 619, sure and steadfast. I won't sing it to you.
You'll be glad to know. Sure and steadfast, the brigade boys' motto, clear. That's our watchword when trouble and trials are near.
[24:10] Friends, that's the idea. The Christian believer is to be sure and steadfast. Stability. So that even when trouble and trials arise, come near, faith will not be uprooted or destroyed.

Through our union with Christ and by the Holy Spirit, Jesus communicates His life and strength to His people. through the teaching of the gospel, we are strengthened and established in this faith.
Our understanding of the person and work of Jesus grows, deepens, and expands, and we are built up in Him to become more like Him.
What will keep you steady? What will make you steadfast? Christ, the way of progress in the Christian life, is not by leaving or abandoning the gospel of Christ or by looking somewhere else or to some other teachings.
It is by more firmly rooting and establishing ourselves in Jesus Christ and in His gospel. The life of Jesus in our hearts, the truth of Jesus in our minds.
[25:33] As we were singing this morning, He is our sure and steady anchor in a world of unbelief and lies. So, there is a relentlessness here about Christian growth, and there is a steadfastness about Christian growth, and then thirdly here, there is a thankfulness about Christian life and growth, abounding in thanksgiving to Him.

The word for abounding here literally means overflowing. Commentators speculate that this may have been one of the catchwords used by the false teachers in Colossae.
And so, Paul may be repeating it here to underline his point that the authentic Christian life flows out of union with Jesus Christ, and indeed it overflows with thanksgiving to Him.
again, if I can quote a song from my childhood Sunday school, running over, running over, my cup's full and running over.
There are actions, but I'm not going to do them. Since the Lord saved me, I'm as happy as can be, my cup's full and running over.
[26:54] And that's what Paul is referring to here. Lives so brimful of thanksgiving to God that they are running over. And this note of thanksgiving is a great feature in so many of Paul's writings.

It tells the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 5, 18, give thanks in all circumstances. In the very next chapter, chapter 3, that we'll look at next month, verses 15 through 17, this is what he says.
Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called on one body, and be thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching, admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. thankfulness is a key ingredient for Christian growth.
An attitude of gratitude is vital. So, as the Lord's people, we're not to be consumed with resentment and bitterness. We're not to be known as grumblers and complainers.
[28:10] We're not to be a bunch of moaning minis. Our lives are to be running over with thankfulness. Now, that's not always easy or natural for us to do, is it?

And you may be saying or you may be thinking, yeah, but how can I be thankful after what's happened to me, what's happened in my life? Friends, there are always things we can be thankful for, always.
there's a story in the book, The Hiding Place, that says Corrie Ten Boom's account of her and her sister Betsy.

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And part of that account is the time they spent in a concentration camp in Ravensbrook for helping Jews escape the Nazis.
and they were placed in a cramped, what you would call flea-ridden accommodation with hundreds of other women. I could paraphrase it, but I'll just read the part of the story.
[29:21] Corrie started up, striking her head on the cross slats above. Something had bitten her leg. Fleas, she cried. Betsy, the place is swarming with them, descending from the platform, edging down a narrow aisle.

They made their way to a patch of light. Hear another one, Corrie wailed. Betsy, how can we live in such a place? Show us, show us how, Betsy said matter-of-factly.
It took Corrie for a moment to realize that her sister was praying. Corrie, Betsy then exclaimed excitedly, he's given us the answer. Before we asked as he always does, in the Bible this morning, where was it?
Read that part again. Corrie checked to see that there were no guards nearby, drew from a pouch a small Bible that she'd managed to smuggle into the concentration camp. It was in 1 Thessalonians, she said, finding the passage in the feeble light.
Here it is. Comfort the frightened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.
[30:29] Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. That's it, Betsy interrupted. That's his answer.

Give thanks in all circumstances. That's what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this barracks. Corrie stared at her incredulously.
Then around the dark, foul-smelling room, such as, she inquired. Such as being assigned here together. Corrie bit her lip.
Oh yes, Lord Jesus, such as what you're holding in your hands. Corrie looked down at the Bible. Yes, thank you, dear Lord, that there was no inspection when we entered here. Thank you for all the women here in this room who will come to meet you and its pages.
Yes, agreed Betsy. Thank you for the crowding here. Since we're packed so close, many more will hear. She looked at her sister expectantly and prodded. Corrie, all right, thank you for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed, suffocating crowds.
[31:36] Thank you, Betsy continued on, for the fleas and for, that was too much for Corrie. She cut in on her sister. Betsy, there's no way even God can make me grateful for a flea.

Give thanks in all circumstances, Betsy corrected. Doesn't say in pleasant circumstances. Fleas are part of this place where God has put us. And so they stood between the stacks of bunks and gave thanks for fleas.
Though on that occasion, Corrie thought Betsy was surely wrong. Weeks passed and Betsy told Corrie, you know, we've never understood why we had so much freedom in the big room for Christian ministry.
Well, I find out. This afternoon there was confusion in my knitting group about sock sizes, so we asked the supervisor to come and settle it, but she wouldn't. She wouldn't step through the door, and neither would the guards.
And do you know why? Betsy could not keep the triumph from her voice, as she exclaimed, because of the fleas.
[32:46] That's what she said. That place is crawling with fleas. Corrie's mind raced back to their first hour in the barracks. She remembered Betsy bowing her head and thanking God for creatures that Corrie could see no use for.

Isn't that an astonishing story? Overflowing with thanksgiving. They were in a Nazi concentration camp. You see, thankfulness is such a crucial spiritual discipline.
We need to constantly be reminding ourselves of God's goodness and grace towards us. We need to be feeding our faith with fresh memories of Christ's goodness and mercy towards us.
Because in a way, thankfulness is what will keep us tied to Jesus Christ. It's the super glue that sticks us close to Him. it's part of the function as we celebrated this morning, the Lord's Supper. We remember and celebrate our Lord Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us, especially in His death on the cross. We fellowship with Him and with one another in the power of the Spirit.
[34:09] That's why in some traditions the Supper is known as the Eucharist. The word just means thanksgiving. It was Shakespeare's King Lear who famously declared how sharper than a serpent's

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tooth it is to have a thankless child.

And Corey told a story this morning about a thankless son. There's a story from long ago on the island of Mauritius of a mother and a daughter who were slaves.
And the mother saved and worked tirelessly over the years to get enough money to buy their freedom. But she could only accumulate enough funds to obtain freedom for one.
She couldn't do it for herself. She could only purchase her daughter's freedom and she did it gladly and willingly. And then sometime later the women had the occasion to enter a room where her daughter was sitting.
And she went across and she sat down beside her. And the daughter became furious and angry. She rebuked her mother. How dare you sit in my presence.
[35:26] You're just a slave. I am a free woman. What appalling ingratitude. She'd forgotten the price that had been paid and who had paid it for her.

Friends, we dare not do the same. Don't be a thankless child of God. Never forget the price that has been paid for your freedom or the one who paid it for us.
We need to ask God to lead us ever to Calvary and to the cross. because at the end of the day, that will keep us drifting away from Jesus Christ.
It's looking to the cross of Christ that helps us to stay and not stray. Jesus paid it all.
All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow. I love that answer of the evangelist Gypsy Smith at the end of his life.
[36:43] When he was asked the secret of his long and fruitful ministry, he replied, I never lost the wonder of it all. And what is that if it is not thankfulness?

We need to stay, not stray. How do we do it? Relentlessness. Keep pressing on. Be relentless in abiding in Jesus. Steadfastness.
Keep digging down. Be steadfastly anchoring your faith in Jesus Christ. Thankfulness. Keep looking up. Be ever thankful for all that Christ has done for you.
By God's grace, may these three hallmarks be evidenced in our Christian lives and experience that we too will be a people who will stay and not stray.
Let's pray together. Amen. God, our Father, we thank you for all that you have given to us in your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
[37:51] Christ, we thank you that in him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Lord, we pray that by your Holy Spirit you would help us be relentless in our Christian lives, walking with Jesus, that you would be, help us to be steadfast in the faith, and that you would help us always to be thankful for all your goodness towards us, that we may grow, that we may mature, and that we may bear fruit for your glory.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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