

## Our Mission in Christ

LIFE IN CHRIST #5 - Pastor Gary Combs - October 18, 2026 - Ephesians 3:1-13

**INTRO:** Good morning church! We are continuing our series this morning entitled, “LIFE IN CHRIST: An Exposition of Ephesians.” Over the past weeks we have been encouraged by the blessings, the prayer, and the transformation that the believers **in Christ** have received. The key phrase in Ephesians is “in Christ.” Paul uses some form of this phrase 36 times in his letter.

As we begin chapter 3 today, Paul turns his attention to his own calling and ministry. In fact, this is one of the most personal passages in Ephesians. Paul refers repeatedly to himself, his calling, his ministry, and his suffering. But why? Why does Paul spend so much time talking about himself?

Because he wants to encourage the Ephesians not to lose heart. You see, Paul is writing this letter from a Roman prison. He had faithfully obeyed Christ's calling to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, yet his obedience had led to imprisonment. This great missionary now finds himself confined under Roman guard.

From a human perspective, this might have looked like a serious setback to the mission. But Paul didn't see it that way. He knew that his imprisonment had not interrupted God's purpose. And he wanted the Ephesians to understand that, too.

**Need:** Have you ever become discouraged while doing something you believed God had called you to do? Maybe you've prayed for a lost family member or friend for years, but they still haven't trusted Christ. Maybe you've invested your time in discipling someone, only to watch them turn away from the faith. Perhaps you've served faithfully in a ministry, but the results haven't matched your expectations. Or maybe you've faced criticism, rejection, or opposition because of your commitment to Christ.

We know that Jesus has commanded us to make disciples of all nations. We know that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. And we know that He has promised to be with us always.

Yet sometimes, despite our obedience, we experience suffering and setbacks. Instead of seeing people come to Christ, we experience rejection. Instead of seeing spiritual growth, we see people fall away. Instead of experiencing encouragement, we face discouragement. And if we're not careful, we can begin to lose heart.

We may not abandon our faith in Christ, but we can lose our enthusiasm for sharing Him with others. We may still attend church, but we no longer serve with the same joy. We may still believe in the Great Commission, but we've stopped actively participating in it.

**Trans:** So how do we keep from losing heart when following Christ and fulfilling His mission becomes difficult? That's the very concern Paul addresses in Ephesians 3. And his answer isn't simply to try harder or work longer. Instead, he reminds us of the glorious mission God is accomplishing through Christ and His church.

**BODY:** In the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he encouraged believers not to lose heart over his suffering by reminding them of his mission in Christ. We can be encouraged not to lose heart in the face of suffering by remembering our mission in Christ. How can remembering our mission in Christ keep us from losing heart? The text gives **three ways** remembering our mission in Christ keeps us from losing heart.

**Read text:** Ephesians 3:1-13 (ESV) For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— 2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. 6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

## REMEMBERING OUR MISSION IN CHRIST KEEPS US FROM LOSING HEART...

### 1. By focusing our hearts on God's revealed mystery.

**EXP:** (1, 13) Before we examine this mystery, notice how Paul begins and ends this passage. He begins with "For this reason I, Paul, **a prisoner of Christ Jesus** on behalf of you Gentiles—" (1). He doesn't describe himself as a prisoner of Rome or Nero, but of Christ Jesus!" Paul understood that his imprisonment was ultimately under Christ's sovereign authority and connected to his calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Notice that Paul didn't open his letter with this. For 2 chapters, he's been describing the blessings and victories we have in Christ. Now, "Oh, BTW, I'm a prisoner for Jesus and for you."

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Now look at the end, Paul writes, "So I ask you not to **lose heart** over what I am **suffering** for you, which is your glory" (13). These 2 verses (1 and 13) frame the entire passage.

**"Lose heart"** (13) (ἐκκακέω, *ekkakeō*) - to be utterly spiritless, exhausted; to fail (in heart); faint, be weary.

**"Suffering"** (13) (θλιψις, *thlipsis*) - a pressing, pressure; metaph. oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress.

Why might they lose heart? Because their spiritual father was now suffering in prison. Paul wanted them to understand that his suffering was not evidence that God's mission had failed. That's why Paul spends verses 2-12 explaining his ministry.

Notice something else, Paul began with **"For this reason"** (1), pointing back to ch. 2, where he explained how Christ had reconciled Jews and Gentiles to God and to one another. But then, he interrupts himself to explain his ministry to the Gentiles. He won't return to that opening thought until his prayer in 3:14.

**EXP:** (2-6) **How can we take heart?** By focusing our hearts on the mystery of the gospel we proclaim, which is God's revealed plan of salvation, bringing people of every nation into one body in Christ.

**"Stewardship"** (2) (οἰκονομία, *oikonomia*) - Lit., "house rules." management, administration, stewardship.

**"Mystery"** (3,4,6,9 - 4x) (μυστήριον, *mystērion*) - hidden thing, secret, mystery. V.6 names the mystery.

**"Made known"** (3,5 - 2x) (γνωρίζω, *gnōrizō*) - to make known, to have thorough knowledge of

**"By revelation"** (3) (ἀποκάλυψις, *apokalypsis*) - An unveiling or disclosure. Likely began with Paul's Damascus Road encounter with the risen Jesus and was further clarified through subsequent revelation..

**"Perceive my insight"** (4) (σύνεσις, *sunesis*) - a flowing together with; knowledge; understanding

**"Now been revealed"** (5) (ἀποκαλύπτω, *apokaluptō*) - revealed "now," in this time, by the Spirit.

**"This mystery is... Gentiles are..."** (6) (ἔθνος, *ethnos*) - a race, a people, Gentiles.

**"Fellow heirs"** (6) (συγκληρονόμος, *sugklēronomos*) - a fellow heir, a joint heir; a joint participant.

**"Same body"** (6) (σύσσωμος, *sussōmos*) - belonging to the same body

**"Partakers of the promise"** (6) (συμμέτοχος, *summetochos*) - partaking together of the same promise.

**ARG:** Paul reminds us that we can confidently proclaim the gospel because it is God's power to save.

Romans 1:16 (ESV) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

**Paul explains that the mystery once hidden has now been revealed to God's people.**

Colossians 1:26-27 (CEV) the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

**ILL:** **How Paul ended up imprisoned in Rome.** - Visited with Ephesian elders on way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:16-38). - Visited Caesarea where Agabus prophesied his imprisonment (Acts 21:7-14). - Visited with James in Jerusalem who had him take 4 men to Temple to perform vows (Acts 21:17-26). - Jews from Asia accuse Paul falsely and riot (Acts 21:27-35) - Paul speaks to crowd: "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles" (Acts 22:1-21). - They respond: "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live." (Acts 22:22-23). Romans arrest him, a Roman citizen, and carried him to Felix at Caesarea (Acts 23:23-35). - Felix kept him for 2 years and left him for Festus (Acts 24:27). - Appealed to Caesar and gave his testimony before Agrippa and Bernice and a great crowd (Acts 25-26). - Shipwrecked (Acts 27). - Met with Jewish leaders in Rome:



Acts 28:28 (ESV) Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.

**APP:** Don't lose confidence in the gospel because some have rejected it. The message hasn't lost its power. God has revealed His saving purpose in Christ, and we have the privilege of making that message known.

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### 2. By strengthening our dependence on God's empowering grace.

**EXP:** (7-9) **How can we take heart?** By strengthening our dependence on the God who calls His servants and also supplies the grace and power needed for their ministry. He empowers us by His grace.

**"Of this gospel"** (7) (εὐαγγέλιον, *euangelion*) - the glad tidings of salvation through Christ; the proclamation of the grace of God manifest and pledged in Christ; the gospel

**"I was made a minister"** (7) (διάκονος, *diakonos*) - one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master, a servant, attendant, minister

**"Grace"** (7,8 - 2x) (χάρις, *charis*) - unmerited gift, unmerited favor, loving kindness.

**"Working of his power"** (7) (ἐνέργεια, *energeia*) - efficiency ("energy"):—operation, strength, power.

**"I am the very least"** (8) (ἐλαχιστότερος, *elachistoteros*) - less than the least, lower the lowest.

**"To preach to the Gentiles"** (8) (εὐαγγελίζω, *euangelizō*) - to bring good news, to announce glad tidings; preach, instruct (men) concerning the things that pertain to Christian salvation

**"Unsearchable riches"** (8) (ἀνεξιχνίαστος, *anexichniastos*) - that cannot be searched out, that cannot be comprehended

**"To bring to light"** (9) (φωτίζω, *phōtizō*) - to give light, to shine; to enlighten, light up, illumine

**"Hidden for ages"** (9) (ἀποκρύπτω, *apokruptō*) - to hide; concealing, keeping secret

**ARG:** **Paul connects God's mercy in giving us ministry directly to our perseverance.**

2 Corinthians 4:1 (ESV) Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

**Paul compares us to fragile jars of clay containing a priceless treasure:**

2 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV) But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

**ILL:** **Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret.** Biography about Taylor. The great missionary to China and founder of the China Inland Mission, experienced a season of deep spiritual discouragement. By 1869, he had already spent years serving Christ in China. Yet despite his remarkable ministry, he was struggling inwardly. Many Chinese had come to Christ, but he was being ridiculed and opposed by fellow missionaries for adopting Chinese dress and customs, he was struggling with poor health and overwhelming responsibilities, and in the midst of all this, his 8-year-old daughter Gracie died, deeply grieving he and wife, Maria.



He prayed, worked, and strove to become more spiritually effective, but found himself exhausted by his own efforts. Then he received a letter from fellow missionary John McCarthy that helped change his perspective. McCarthy wrote, "Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One."

Taylor discovered that the secret of spiritual strength wasn't greater self-effort but deeper dependence upon Christ. Taylor is famously known for saying: "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."

**APP:** Don't lose heart because you feel inadequate for the ministry Christ has given you. Remember that God's mission depends upon His power, not your abilities. Paul was uniquely commissioned as an apostle, but every believer depends upon the same divine grace to serve Christ faithfully.

### 3. By lifting our eyes to God's eternal purpose.

**EXP:** (10-12) **How can we take heart?** By lifting our eyes to see that God is accomplishing something through His church that is far greater than what we can presently see.

**"The church"** (10) (ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*) - an assembly of people, the church.

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**"Manifold wisdom" (10)** (πολυποίκιλος σοφία, *polupoikilos sophia*) - many-colored, richly varied, or multifaceted wisdom. Something beautifully intricate, like a tapestry woven with many different colors. The church is God's living masterpiece, displaying the many-colored wisdom of His eternal plan in Christ. Through the church, God puts His extraordinary wisdom on display. What the world sees as an unlikely collection of different people, heaven sees as a magnificent display of God's wisdom.

**"Eternal purpose" (11)** (πρόθεσις, *prothesis*) - a setting forth, purpose. Combined with "eternal" (lit., "of the ages"), it describes God's predetermined plan, established before the ages and carried out in history.

**"Realized in Christ" (11)** (ποιέω, *poiēō*) - to do, make, or accomplish. Not a future possibility, but already accomplished in Christ Jesus.

**"We have boldness" (12)** (παρρησία, *parrēsia*) - freedom in speaking, openly, frankly, fearlessly.

**"Access with confidence" (12)** (προσγωγή, *prosagōgē*) - access, approach. Believers not only have permission to approach God; they may do so with confident assurance through faith in Christ. Paul may have been confined by Roman guards, but through Christ he had unrestricted access to God's throne!

**ARG:** Paul encourages us not to lose heart because our present afflictions are temporary, but our future...

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (ESV) So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

**ILL:** **The Church is like a diamond.** What makes a diamond so brilliant? It's the many facets that reflect and refract the light. As you turn the diamond, each facet catches the light differently, revealing another dimension of its beauty. Yet all those facets belong to one magnificent jewel.



That's a picture of the church. We come from different nations, cultures, backgrounds, and walks of life. Yet through Jesus Christ, God has brought us together into one body. Like the many facets of a diamond, our unity in Christ displays the extraordinary beauty of God's wisdom.

And Paul says that God is displaying this magnificent wisdom not only before the world, but even before the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Heaven itself is witnessing the glory of God's eternal purpose through His church!

**APP:** Don't measure the significance of your gospel ministry solely by visible results. Remember that through His church God is displaying His manifold wisdom according to His eternal purpose accomplished in Christ.

**CONCLUSION:** Paul began this passage as a prisoner of Christ Jesus and ended by urging the Ephesians not to lose heart. Why? Because he knew that God's eternal purpose in Christ could not be defeated by his imprisonment and suffering.

And we can know that, too. Just look at the cross. When Jesus was crucified, it looked like the greatest defeat in history. But what looked like defeat was actually God's greatest victory! Through His death and resurrection, Jesus conquered sin and death, making salvation available to all who repent and believe.

And now He has entrusted us with the mission of making this good news known.

So church, don't lose heart! When the mission gets difficult, remember the mystery of the gospel God has revealed, the grace He supplies, and the eternal purpose He is accomplishing through us, His church!

**The mission is God's. The power is God's. And through Jesus Christ, the victory is God's**

Let's pray.