

What God Wants to Say to Us

1. Warm up: George Bernard Shaw once said, “The greatest problem with communication is the assumption that it has taken place.” Have you experienced any funny or frustrating miscommunications lately?
2. The hardest part of communication is listening and comprehending. Most of us tend to talk a lot, but listen much less. The same is true of our communication with God. In our prayers, we do a lot of talking, but rarely take time to listen. In your personal prayer life, what percentage of your time would you guess you spend listening to God? What are some practical ways we can listen for God’s voice in our prayer times?
3. When we study the Bible, we also often bring an agenda. We have certain questions we want answered, and that’s good. But it’s also important that we sometimes read scripture passages without preconceived notions or questions, allowing God’s Spirit set the agenda and say whatever God wants to say to us. We’re practicing that kind of listening in the study we began on Sunday of the Apostle Paul’s New Testament letter to the Colossians. Our focus in this first week is on the first twelve verses of chapter 1. So let’s read that passage again, Colossians 1:1-12, as printed on p. 3.
4. On Sunday, Jeff shared three key statements from our scripture passage that he felt God might want to highlight for us, starting with the following statement in verse 11: **“Be prepared to endure everything with patience and joy.”** Endurance is an oft-repeated theme in the New Testament. Jeff defined endurance as the ability to bear a hard thing with *bonne humeur* [bon-uh-moor], a French term that means “high spirits.”
 - a. Chuck Swindoll says, “I’m convinced that life is ten percent what happens to us and ninety percent how we react to it.” James Kennedy adds, “What really matters is what happens in us, not to us.” What point are they trying to make? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?
 - b. Have you ever known someone who had the ability to endure great hardship with *bonne humeur*? Tell us about them and what enabled them to face hardship with such high spirits.
 - c. Hope is the secret ingredient that fuels high spirits during times of great hardship. Admiral Jim Stockdale, the highest ranking U.S. POW held in Vietnam’s infamous Hanoi Hilton prison camp, once said, “A person can endure anything if they have hope.” But Stockdale emphasized that hope mustn’t be confused with wishful thinking. *Reasonable* hope is the key. Tell us about a time when you embraced wishful thinking and, as a result, fell into despair.
 - d. Think of a big challenge you’re facing right now. What’s the challenge? And tell us what might be your “next reasonable hope” in that situation. Are you allowing yourself to embrace that hope?

- e. Suppose you face a grave challenge, identify your next reasonable hope, but that reasonable hope doesn't materialize – because not every reasonable hope does. What then?
5. As people of faith, each of us always has an *ultimate* next reasonable hope, which is found in the second key statement that Jeff emphasized. In verse 5, Paul reminds the Colossian Christians of **“the hope laid up for you in heaven.”** The way that verse is phrased reminded Jeff of a time when department stores offered Layaway Plans.
 - a. For those who may not know, describe what Layaway Plans were. Did your parents ever buy anything on Layaway? How did they feel while they waited?
 - b. As followers of Jesus, we each have a Heavenly Layaway Plan. A wise person once said, “As we age and loved ones pass away, each of us eventually gets to the point when we realize, ‘I’ve got more waiting for me in heaven than I’ve got left here on earth.’” What do you think that means? Is this a happy or sad thought?
 - c. Tell us about someone in your Heavenly Layaway Plan. In other words, who’s someone that’s passed away that you will be thrilled to see again in heaven?
 - d. As you think about the loved ones awaiting you in heaven, how does that make you feel? How does the hope of seeing them again affect how you feel about your life right here right now?
 6. Although hope is rocket fuel for enduring life’s hardships, the question remains: Why does life have to be so hard? Jeff pointed us to a third key statement in our scripture passage. In verse 6, speaking to the Colossian Christians and by extension us, Paul said, **“The Gospel is bearing fruit and growing . . . [in] you since the day you heard it.”** The word “gospel” is shorthand for “the message of Jesus.” In verse 6, Jeff said, we find the primary purpose for our time here on earth. It’s like we’re in spring training or preparing for the Olympics. We are eternal beings who are in the process of getting ready for the life to come by growing our souls into all God dreamed we could be.
 - a. Read the quote from C.S. Lewis printed on p. 3, then share whatever thoughts arise within you as you engage his words.
 - b. A renowned surgeon, Dr. Paul Brand spoke about his physical peak, mental peak, and spiritual peak. Our ultimate objective in life, he suggested, is to reach our spiritual peak. Picture hiking up a mountain that represents your spiritual peak. How far up the mountain are you? Explain your answer.
 - c. If our primary purpose on earth is for the Gospel to grow within us and bear beautiful fruit, Jeff asked us all to consider this question: If you were to compare where you are now in the process of becoming more like Jesus to where you were two years ago, how have you changed? In what way (or ways) are you stronger and more beautiful now than you were two years ago?

Colossians 1:1-12

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

³ In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. ⁷This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit. ⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to God, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from God's glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience and joy, ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory"

"Remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day [in the next life] be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would strongly be tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these [eternal outcomes]. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal."