



2025 in Review

Colossians 1:28

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia
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2025 IN REVIEW

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This morning, I'd like to look at 2025 in review. It's helpful to review the year before it's completely in the rearview mirror. I'm talking about a review of our discipleship, our walk with God, and how we've grown spiritually in the last year. Are you closer to God now than twelve months ago? Are your prayers deeper than a year ago? Are you walking and abiding with Jesus in a deeper way? Do you love and trust Him more than you did a year ago?

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul said, "We proclaim Jesus, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone *complete in Christ*" (Colossians 1:28). "Complete" means mature.¹ The Greek word was used to describe finishing a project, reaching a destination, or graduating from school. It was used to describe parenting a child and launching them into adulthood. So we are to be "complete in Christ."

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul was concerned about the spiritual development of the young believers there, "exhorting and encouraging and imploring" them to "walk in a manner worthy of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:12, 4:1). And then he said, "We pray earnestly that we may see your face and *complete what is lacking in your faith*" (1 Thessalonians 3:10). Another version says, "to fill the gaps in your faith" (NLT).

We know we're not perfect and we admit we have room to grow.² We know we need to narrow the gap between what we know and how we live.

To narrow that gap, we must be in God's word and rely on the Holy Spirit to shape us according to His word and His will. That's why we spend so much time reading and studying the Bible. Paul said, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NAS).

"Complete in Christ." "Lacking" nothing. "Adequate and equipped." Everything we do is for the purpose of spiritual maturity. So, let's review what we studied this past year.

PHILIPPIANS – TO LIVE IS CHRIST

We began the year with a study of Philippians, in which Paul made his great declaration. "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21, ESV).

That was the message of Paul's letter to the Philippians, and that was the message of Paul's life. For Paul, life was about faithfully serving Jesus, and death was about finally seeing Jesus. So, whether he lived or died, it was all about Jesus.

Paul had encountered Jesus on the Damascus Road. He was overcome by Jesus and he was convinced that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus defined who Paul was, what he believed, and how

he lived. And that should be true of us. Being a Christian is more than attending church, praying before you eat, or being a nice person. As Christians, we are defined by the one we follow.

“For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” It means everything revolves around Jesus, everything finds meaning in Him, everything is submitted to Him. “To live is Christ” means Jesus shapes who we are, what we think, what we value, and how we live. May we join Paul in saying, “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21, ESV).

EASTER – SYMBOLS OF THE GOSPEL

Last Easter, we looked at three symbols of the Gospel – the veil, the cross, and the cornerstone.

The veil is the Jewish symbol of our faith. The temple veil reminded people that God was holy, and they were not. It was a physical barrier separating sinful man from the holy presence of God. Yet, the moment Jesus died on the cross, the veil was torn from top to bottom, symbolizing that we have access to God.

The cross, of course, is the sacred symbol of our faith. Yes, it’s odd that a Roman tool for execution became the symbol of our faith, yet we proudly identify with the cross. We display it, we wear it, and we decorate with it, because it is through the cross that we find salvation and eternal life. As Paul said, we “boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”³

The cornerstone symbolizes the foundation of our faith. Because of His victorious resurrection, Jesus is that cornerstone.⁴ He is the only reliable foundation upon which to build our lives.

Acts 4 records what happened just two months after the resurrection. “While Peter and John were speaking to the people, they were confronted ... The leaders were very disturbed that Peter and John were teaching the people that through Jesus there is a resurrection of the dead. So, they arrested them ... But many who heard the message believed it, about five thousand” (Acts 4:1-4, NLT).

Peter believed because he was an eyewitness. He saw Jesus bleed and die on the cross, and he saw Jesus alive again. He couldn’t stop talking about it. And that’s why he was arrested. In response to his interrogators, Peter said, “The man whom you crucified God raised from the dead” (Acts 4:10, NLT). Peter said, “The stone you rejected has now become the cornerstone” (Acts 4:11, NLT). Peter was saying, “I stand here today declaring that the resurrection proves that Jesus is the true cornerstone and the only reliable foundation upon which to build our lives.”

Centuries earlier the Lord promised, “I lay a stone in Zion (a leader from Jerusalem), a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be disappointed. To those who believe, this stone is precious” (1 Peter 2:6-7, NIV). Jesus Christ is the cornerstone and foundation of our faith. Everything we believe, everything we trust, everything we hope, rests on Jesus. As Peter said, “To those who believe, this stone is precious” (1 Peter 2:7, NIV). To those who believe, to us, Jesus is precious.

GREAT PRAYERS

Last fall, we considered the amazing thought that the majestic creator of the universe has invited us to talk to Him.

Prayer is the wonderful gift of experiencing a relationship with God and having a conversation with Him. The invitation to pray proves how much God loves us and cares about us. It's the way we cry out to Him for help and ask Him to meet our needs. And prayer really makes a difference because He promises to listen and He promises to act.

There are 650 prayers in the Bible, and we studied the great prayers of David and Solomon and the desperate prayers of Jonah and Jeremiah. We looked at John 17 and how Jesus prays for us. We've studied several principles of prayer. Like Jesus giving us permission to ask, and how much faith it takes for God to answer our prayers, and intercession, believing enough and caring enough to pray for other people. We dealt with hard issues like when God says no. We studied a lot about prayer, but the goal was not to learn more, but to pray more!

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He gave them what we call The Lord's Prayer.⁵ Let's recite the traditional version together.

"Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." (Matthew 6:9-13, traditional)⁶

The Lord's Prayer was never meant to be a mechanical, formal, or recited prayer. Instead, it was intended to be a model for personal, intimate prayer.⁷ Because ...

- Prayer is simply talking to God. And we pray at His invitation. "Call to Me and I will answer you," He said (Jeremiah 33:3).
- Prayer is not doing something; it's being with someone. It's being in His company, being in His presence.
- Prayer is drawing near to God as He promises to draw near to us.⁸
- Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God and crying out to Him for help.⁹
- Prayer is also listening to God and allowing Him to guide us.
- And how often and how deeply we pray reveals what we really think and believe about God.

Especially when we studied The Lord's Prayer, we learned two things. That we can approach God with confidence because He is our Father, and that we must approach Him with reverence because He is holy. "Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name."

COLOSSIANS – FIRMLY ROOTED

Thirty years after the resurrection, Paul wrote a letter to the believers in Colossae urging them to keep their eyes on Jesus. Paul mentioned Jesus in 53 of the 95 verses in this letter. He lifted Jesus as the one and only Savior and Lord, and said, “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, firmly rooted and being built up in Him” (Colossians 2:6-7, NAS).

We believe what was written to the Colossians is written for us as well. Paul urges us to “walk in manner worthy of the Lord” and to give Jesus “first place in everything.” He warns us, “Do not let anyone deceive you,” or distract you from believing, trusting, and following Jesus. Paul encourages us to “set our minds on things above, where Christ is seated.” He urges us to “put off the old self” and “put on the new self,” so our lives will reflect the character of Christ. He said, “Put on a heart of compassion,” put on the heart of Jesus. And with one summarizing statement, Paul said, “Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

All these things define what it means to be “firmly rooted.” “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, firmly rooted and being built up in Him” (Colossians 2:6-7, NAS).

The prophet Jeremiah said, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord ... He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit” (Jeremiah 17:7-8, ESV). David said the same thing in Psalm 1. “His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither, and in whatever he does, he prospers” (Psalm 1:2-3, NAS).

What do roots do? They provide nourishment. As Jeremiah said, “Its leaves remain green.” As David said, “Its leaf does not wither.”

Jesus taught the same concept in John 15, when He said, “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” (John 15:5, ESV). As roots provide nourishment to the tree, so Jesus provides nourishment to the soul.

And how do we receive that nourishment? What did David say? “His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2, NAS). It is God’s word that nourishes the soul.

HE IS BORN

This Christmas, a great song provided our theme – “He Is Born.”

Some 360,000 people are born every day. Some are born rich, but most are born poor. Some grow up to be famous, but most do not. But for every woman who gives birth, her baby is special. That was certainly the case 2,000 years ago when a Jewish teenager gave birth to her son. An angel declared, “I bring you good news of a great joy ... For today in the city of David there

has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!" (Luke 2:10-11). The most unique and most significant birth in history was the birth of Jesus. The Savior of the world – He is born!

During Christmas, we also looked at several metaphors Jesus used to describe Himself.

He said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12, ESV). He said, "Believe in the light" (John 12:36, ESV). "Believe in Me!" Jesus said, "I am the light of the world ... so that whoever believes in me ... will have the light of life."¹⁰

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me (whoever believes in me) will never be hungry again ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:35, 51, NLT). As "the bread of life," only Jesus can satisfy the deepest hunger of the soul.

He also said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me (if anyone believes in me), he will be saved" (John 10:9, ESV). Jesus, and only Jesus, gives us permission to enter into God's presence, into God's grace, into God's family. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, NAS). Peter declared it when he said, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name ... by which we can be saved" (Acts 4:12, ESV).¹¹ Jesus is "the door." Jesus is the Son of God and the only way to God.

CONCLUSION

As 2025 comes to an end, are you closer to God now than twelve months ago? Are your prayers deeper than a year ago? Are you walking and abiding with Jesus in a deeper way? Do you love and trust Him more than you did a year ago?

May the lessons of 2025 be deeply embedded in your heart.

- May we join Paul in saying, "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."
- May we join Peter in saying, "I stand here today declaring that the resurrection proves that Jesus is the true cornerstone and the only reliable foundation upon which to build our lives."
- May we pray as Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name." Approaching Him with confidence because He is our Father, and approaching Him with reverence because He is holy.
- May Paul's words be true of us. "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, firmly rooted and being built up in Him."
- And may we know and declare that Jesus is "the door," that Jesus is the Son of God and the only way to God.

NOTES

¹ Two interesting Greek words are used in the New Testament to describe spiritual maturity. The first is *teleios*. It means to finish, to reach an end, to complete a process. It was used to depict physical development of the human body, to refer to someone who is fully grown. It's like parenting a child and launching them into adulthood. Thus, the word *teleios* came to depict spiritual maturity and found in these verses.

- Matthew 5:48 – “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
- Ephesians 4:13 – “Until we all attain ... to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.”
- Colossians 1:28 – “that we present every man complete in Christ”

The second word for maturity is *katartizo*. It means to furnish, to supply, to train, and to equip. It was used in numerous ways to convey the idea of preparing for service and found in these verses.

- Matthew 4:21 – fishermen “mending” their nets, the idea of repairing
- Luke 6:40 – disciples or students being “fully trained,” teaching and training
- Galatians 6:1 – to “restore” a wayward believer with gentleness, restoring
- Ephesians 4:12 – “equipping the saints” for ministry, preparing for service
- 2 Timothy 3:17 – “equipped” for every good work, as training and supplying a soldier

² Paraphrasing what Paul admitted in Philippians 3:12, “I have not arrived. I’m not perfect. That’s why I keep pressing on to become the man Jesus saved me to be. No, I’m not there yet. But I choose to forget about my past and look forward to my future. Each day wanting to become more and more like Jesus.”

³ See Galatians 6:14. Also 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:2.

⁴ See Acts 4:11, Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:4-8.

⁵ See Luke 11:1. J. I. Packer writes, “Three venerable formulae together add up to Christianity: the Apostle’s Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer, summarizing respectively the Christian way of believing, behaving, and communing with God.” [J. I. Packer, *Praying the Lord’s Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), page 11]

⁶ On the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem is the Convent of Pater Noster, the Convent of Our Father, built over the site where Jesus taught His disciples the Lord’s Prayer. The walls of the convent are decorated with ceramic tiles, each inscribed with the Lord’s Prayer so that it can be recited in 140 languages. The convent also has a website posting the Lord’s Prayer in 1,653 different languages and dialects. Which means the Lord’s Prayer can be prayed by almost every person in the world.

⁷ I love what Max Lucado writes. “When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He gave them a prayer. Not a lecture on prayer. Not the doctrine of prayer. He gave them a quotable, repeatable, portable prayer.” [Max Lucado, *Before Amen* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014), page 6.]

⁸ See James 4:8.

⁹ See Psalm 62:8.

¹⁰ Combination of John 8:12 and John 12:46.

¹¹ Paul adds, “There is one God and one mediator between God ... Jesus Christ” (1 Timothy 2:5).