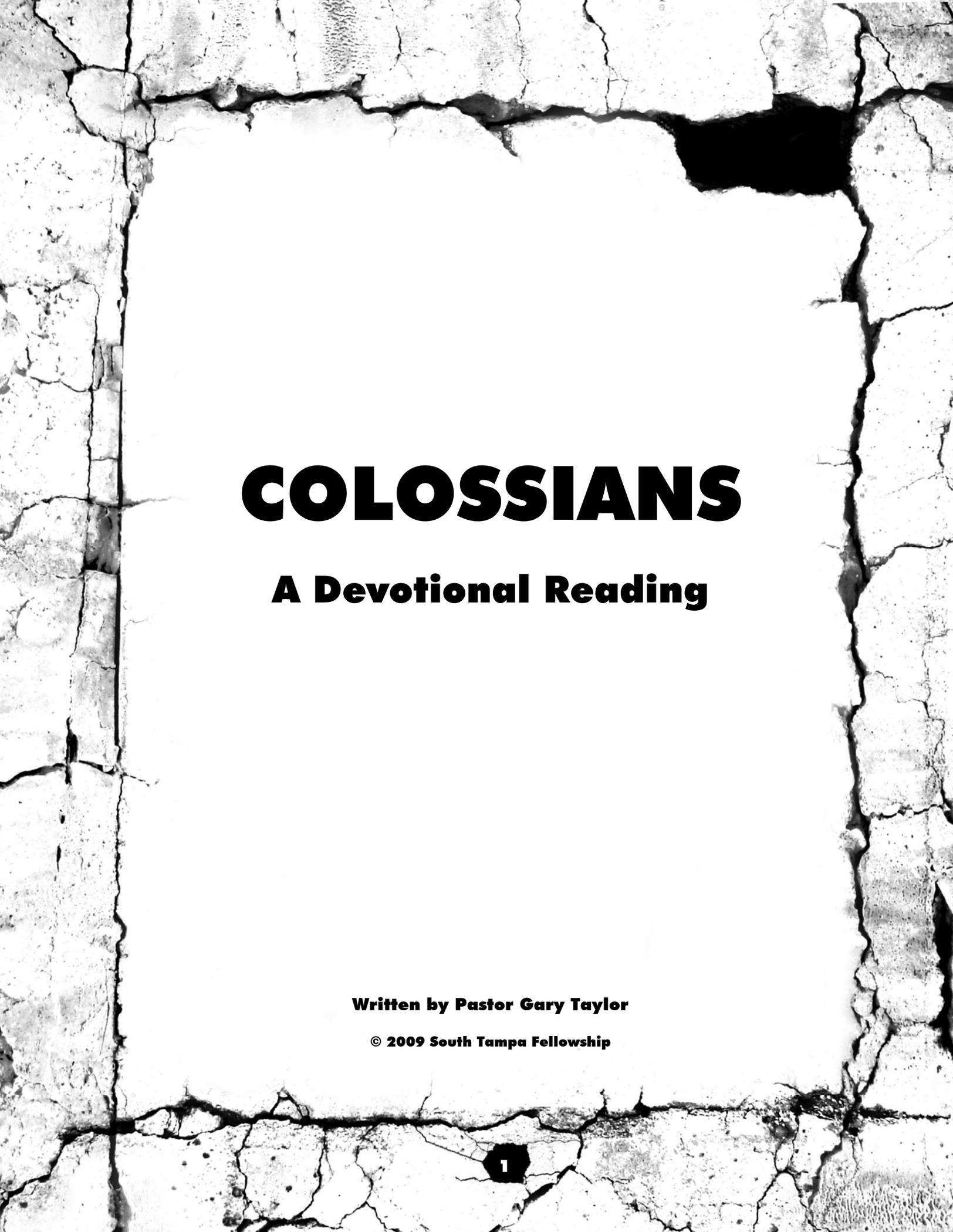


SOUTH TAMPA FELLOWSHIP

COLOSSIANS
QUAKES

A DEVOTIONAL READING
ON COLOSSIANS



COLOSSIANS

A Devotional Reading

Written by Pastor Gary Taylor

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I Used To Hate Naps

Oh, I love naps now. I love naps so much that sometimes I take naps on accident – in the middle of a television program, during an important conversation with my wife, or when driving on long road trips. Falling asleep during two of those three has the potential of killing you. It’s amazing I’m alive really.

But when I was a kid, sharing a room with my little brother, we hated Sunday nap time. Our twin beds flanked the low-slung, angled walls of the converted attic. Mom’s instructions were clear, and probably familiar to many of you, too:

“Don’t get up until I tell you.”

“No talking. If you can’t get to sleep, lie there quietly.”

“If you come downstairs and ask if you can get up, I will say “no” and add 30 minutes to your nap time.”

We hated naps. I was young, but my brother was younger, and therefore easily manipulated. I recall telling him on several occasions that if he would go down and ask Mom if we could get up, I would give him some bread. (Yes, bread. Remember, he was young, gullible, and easy to please.) This was our conversation:

Me: “Ask Mom if we can get up now.”

My brother: “But I will get in trouble.”

Me: “I will give you a slice of bread.”

My brother: “Really?! All right then.”

Within a few seconds of him being downstairs I heard Mom yelling at him to get back to our room.

All that for some *bread*? This would be a more believable story coming from Auschwitz, but I swear it really happened in Brentwood, MO.

Psalm 23 is a familiar passage to many of you. I read it the other day and was really struck by the phrase, “He *makes* you lie down in green pastures.” God knows this peaceful, refreshing place that we need to spend time, but we are restless sheep who hate naps. We have to be made to lie down.

A devotional such as this – whether you are reading it or listening to an audio version – is one of the ways we hope you choose to lie down, to slow down, to be refreshed by God’s Word. In my journey thus far I have learned that I can choose to lie down, or I will reach a point where I am made to lie down. I truly believe there is only so much a physical body can do before it needs the refreshment of spiritual nourishment.

Let me give you a brief overview of our eight weeks: Week 1, as you will notice, spends more time in Acts than it does in Colossians. This may cause some of you to pause and ask, “This was supposed to be a *Colossians* devotional, right? Here’s the reason for laying a foundation with passages outside of

Foreword

Colossians: In Acts we discover important details that will give us invaluable insights into the background of the author (Paul), the reason and setting for writing the Colossian letter (from a Roman prison cell during his missionary travels), and also Paul's personal experience of surviving an earthquake.

Then from Week 2 through the end of Week 8 we will journey from Colossians 1:1 through to the end of the letter in chapter 4. Expect a lot of stories – most of which are embarrassing and offbeat experiences from my life. Feel free to laugh *with*, but not *at*.

Finally, I highly encourage you to read the daily passages that coincide with each day's story. I can't *make* you slow down to read and reflect. The choice is yours. But here's my promise: If you lie down, God may give you some Bread.

– Gary Taylor

Day 1: It's Not My Fault

Acts 16:25-34

It's a set of words we learn to string together as young children: "It's not my fault." And then we blame someone else.

I grew up in Missouri, where we felt earthquakes every great once in a while. I personally never experienced an earthquake that did any structural damage to our house, but I vividly recall the rumbling items on the shelves, the rattling picture frames against the walls, flickering lights, followed by quick prayers for mercy.

Our section of the Midwest was cautioned about the possibility of a future earthquake that could have devastating effects. This warning was based on the fact that the New Madrid fault line ran precariously close to our city. Back in 1811 and 1812, magnitude 8.0 earthquakes resulted in massive landslides, sections of the Mississippi River appeared to run backward for a short time, and church bells were reported to ring as far away as Boston.

Driven by heat dissipation deep within our planet, inner tectonic plates shift, causing the movement to radiate to the earth's surface. I'm guessing that you don't care for a science lesson, so let me quickly make my point: Damage on the surface is caused by a fault beneath the surface.

The New Madrid fault is at least a thousand miles away, so maybe you and I here in Florida feel smugly secure and safe from the ill effects of that fault line. And maybe we are safe – from *that* particular fault. But let's be honest here. We would be foolish to think that anyone's life is completely immune to quakes, those times when their faith gets shaken to the core.

Have you ever heard of someone falling prey to a sin that caused you to haughtily wonder why anyone would ever be so stupid as to do "*that*"? I think of the guy who threw a baby from a moving car, or the horrendous atrocities by serial rapists. What could possibly drive someone to act like that?! Or maybe you can't get your mind around why people have difficulty controlling their alcohol intake or their spending or their appetite. Maybe you will never struggle with those particular temptations. That will never be your "fault." But somewhere beneath the surface you do have faults, cracks, fissures. And when the heat is on, perhaps when you least expect it, a shift within your heart leads to your solid reputation being rattled and leveled in one fateful moment.

It's so easy to judge, isn't it? It's easy to recognize that a thousand miles away someone has a "New Madrid fault," but that shift beneath the surface will never impact me way over here. And, sure enough, that fault will likely never have any bearing on your life. That "New Madrid" fault, well, let's just say that it's not *my* fault.

But what is? What hides beneath the surface of your life? Before things shift, prior to the magnitude 8.0 quake at work or in your home, consider this: How solid is the foundation of your life?

The question is *not* whether you have faults. What we are addressing here is that we all have faults, so are we building our lives on the foundation of Christ that can withstand even our deepest faults?

Week 1

When we fail to make time for God, we are conceding to some cracks and fissures forming in our soul. When we are shaken by an 8.0 magnitude of anger, for example, it's proof that something beneath the surface of our life shifted, giving way underneath the weight of pressure and temptation.

Paul challenges the Colossians to admit that not only their city but also their spiritual lives can be rocked by unseen forces beneath the surface. So he writes to expose those fault lines, encouraging them to retrofit their foundation in Christ in preparation for any shifting that takes place. When shift happens, will you hide by saying, "It's not my fault"? A necessary first step is to own up to our faults.

Day 2: Road Trip Acts 13-14

A lifelong desire of mine as a Midwesterner has been to travel as much of Route 66 as currently exists. Beginning in Chicago, driving to L.A., this would be ideally experienced in a 1960s VW Splitty Microbus. I had dreamed of it for years, and the thought of “the love of my life” making the trip with me would be the grooviest.

I waxed eloquent as I verbally painted a colorful picture for Beth of my Route 66 dream getaway, detailing the diners and novelties now hidden by our modern highway system and the franchised chains that have suffocated so many quaint, iconic, roadside stops.

After my irresistible description of this small-town America tour, I asked Beth what she thought about my idea. Her response was brief and to the point:

“I’d be willing to fly out and meet you in L.A.”

Oh well, maybe our son will someday make the trip with me.

The apostle Paul was a guy who apparently wasn’t afraid to hit the open road, or the open sea, for that matter. With the Holy Spirit playing a more prominent role than a map or GPS, his dream life was spent traveling and sharing the gospel while also encouraging newly formed churches. As I read of his travels, in my mind’s eye I can see him seated behind the large steering wheel of his VW Splitty, sharing stories with his good friend Luke. For that matter, I picture hand-painted signs on the side of his seven-seater Standard such as “grace and ...” followed by a peace sign. With a rolled bandana tied around his forehead to keep his dreadlocks out of his eyes, he slept at campgrounds, visiting with those who lived in tents he himself had made.

Paul learned and even embraced the fact that journeys have unexpected turns. For example, he was blinded on a road to Damascus. And this letter to the Colossae faithful was penned from a prison cell after some religious cops hauled him in for basically protesting as a stranger and alien in this world. Undeterred, Paul continued his journey in writing.

The more I get to know Beth, the more I notice all that we have in common. No, she will likely never accompany me on a single-lane road in New Mexico, but we love to journey together. We have experienced the blessedness of blindness along the road of career changes or while caring for terminally ill family members. We have been imprisoned by confusion and concerns, yet still allowed to experience freedom in Christ. And it seems that everywhere we set up camp, we are graced with the irreplaceable companionship of godly sojourners.

Where is God leading us? We can’t say for sure, but simply buying a ticket to fly to the final destination sure seems like we’d miss a lot of quality time with God in the car. And really, that’s what it’s about, right?

Paul made the most of his wild ride. His life is one of many biblical inspirations that can challenge us. What’s your dream getaway with God? Maybe we need to spend less time dreaming of the eventual

Week 1

destination. Instead, roll down a window, push back the canvas ragtop, turn up *Dust in the Wind*, and make the most of a day riding shotgun alongside God.

I believe that if you commit to that journey, God says, *Well done, my good and faithful servant*. Or maybe, just maybe, He will simply say, *Groovy, man. Groovy.*

Day 3: Clouds Acts 9:1-19

Psalms 119:135 (ESV) – “Make your face shine upon your servant.”

I’m sitting outside at Ja-Vahz coffee shop. It’s a cloudy, overcast start to the day. I could climb onto the roof of this patio, stretch toward the clouds in an attempt to peel them back, splitting them to let some sunshine break through. I could TRY to do that, but I can’t.

Even if I could reach the clouds – or if the dreary clouds sank low enough to reach me – my hands are not able to grasp and pull a cloud without it filtering through my fingers. Digging and pawing frantically would never be enough. I’m weary at even the thought of trying to do the grand things that only God can do.

Your face, Father, is the light I want shining onto my life today. Do the things only You can do in order for the light of Your face to illuminate my path. At this time, as a symbol of resting in You, I climb down from the rooftops of my self-righteous acts. I rest weary hands that seek to poke through and prove my worthiness.

As I sit here on this cloudy day I notice, too, that I have no need for artificial lighting in order to read and journal. It’s cloudy, but not dark. I didn’t turn on the headlights *en route* to this coffee shop. The sun still radiates sufficiently through cloudy coverings.

Sometimes I think I want a blinding light every day on my Damascus Road. I am perhaps addicted to the extreme and wow-filled moments of spiritual ecstasy. *God, help me not to overlook or grow discontent with the ways You still shine on the less-than-wow days characterized by cloudiness and ordinariness.*

This is the day the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it.

My conversion experience really was not a cloud-parting, bright light moment like it was for Paul. The overcast and ominous skies that typically define the season known as high school dominated my weekly weather report: showers of temptations, swirling winds of a confused and lost identity. The blah grays of failed and dissatisfying relationships blanketed my days.

And then I turned my life over to God, or at least as best as I knew how to do at the time.

Was there a bright, blinding light? Not really. I woke up the next day in the same, gray relationships. Temptations seemed to maybe hover closer and lower, to be honest. Questions still swirled.

But there was something different. I had difficulty explaining it – and still do – but it’s as if God began showing me that His face still shines, even on cloudy days.

I began to understand that life didn’t end with clouds; in fact, there was a Life just beyond them that longs to shine on me so much that it relentlessly determines to bleed through. It is sufficient, even when the clouds refuse to burn off or part.

Week 1

Perhaps that is much of what Paul meant in another of his letters when he wrote, *Your grace is sufficient*. Clear blue skies are wonderful, yet the grays of grace are indeed sufficient. I think it's wise for us to remember that even for the apostle Paul not every day was a cloud-parting, all-sunshine, bright-light encounter with God. But even on cloudy days we can experience God in life-changing ways.

Day 4: Long Wait

Colossians 1:24-29; 4:10-18

When waiting for a doctor's appointment, I arrived early enough to fill out the ridiculously large amount of paperwork – insurance info, family health history, contact information, and some legal stuff that maybe included naming my firstborn son after the doctor. (*Fahid* would have been a great middle name for Jack).

I remember it vividly: My appointment was for 1:30. Like I said, I showed up early, around 1:15. I don't expect any doctor to actually be on time, so I settle in to read a bit. Two o'clock rolls around, and still my name has yet to be called. I begin to mentally catalog those who arrived before me, indicating the number of appointments to still get called before me. That number is close to 8(!). Trying not to be too antsy, I continue to wait. Eventually, 2:30 rolls around -- still not close to having my name called.

I make my way up to the receptionist and ask how long she estimates it may be. I try to ask in a way that hides my extreme frustration with the ordeal. She apologizes, stating that "this never happens." And, of course, she will call me in when it's my turn.

Three o'clock arrives. I still wait. By this time I'm about to explode. At this point of the story, you may find it interesting why I made the appointment in the first place: not because I had the flu; not for a sore throat or cough. I scheduled this time to see the doctor for *ANXIETY!*

I glance around the "waiting" room, realizing now more than ever how it got its name. Something catches my attention: Of the 8-10 of us in that room, I am the only one who appears upset by the extremely long wait. Baffling. How do they do it???

After nearly a two-hour wait, the doctor finally calls me in. His first question is, "What can I do for you, Mr. Taylor?" Without hesitating I point in the direction of the waiting room and reply: "I want you to prescribe for me whatever drugs those people are on."

Paul wrote the book of Colossians from prison. As I read this prison epistle, I'm baffled by the fact that Paul doesn't appear to be perturbed, upset, or put off by these most dire of circumstances. As best I can tell, he was taking a daily, even moment-by-moment dose of the Holy Spirit.

I want God to prescribe for me what Paul was on.

Day 5: Muse

2 Corinthians 11:16-28

This is one of those moments when I wish I could draw. Even if that were my talent, I'd still need more than a black ink pen to do this sunset justice.

I'm seated on a cold concrete bench along Bayshore, facing Hillsborough Bay. The clouds are sparsely fanned out, like a deck of playing cards across the light-blue felt of a poker table. An airplane, or so I surmise, dashes through the thin layer of clouds, pulling with it a feather-shaped stream – the softly angled bristles connect to the central vein of the quill. It slowly drifts toward a three-quarter moon.

The late-day air is crisp and still, the water calm. There are two of each tall building along Bayshore: the one that's always standing there, plus its twin that reflects on the water at dusk. Cars hum behind me, tires rhythmically clacking across the seams in the concrete. I've noted that the passing joggers have different sounds between them: Some race down the sidewalk, others clomp. The former have the light-footed cadence of finely-tuned athleticism. The others are the forced strides of those who are driven by guilt from overeating two days ago at Thanksgiving. I myself only burn calories as my hand and pen sprint along the page, trying to capture all of this moment before it becomes too dark to continue journaling.

God, this is one of those places where You allow me to write thoughts and offer praise to You as Creator. In sharp contrast to this breathtaking arena is the sunless and dank Roman prison cell where Paul was inspired to write to the Colossians (a people he really had never even met in person).

Would a love for God and for those He loves inspire me to make the most of *any* and *every* moment – even the chaffing of limits, the overcrowding of others' needs, and the hunger of disappointment? I fear that at times I am a spoiled, fair-weather apostle. Am I inspired only by favorable surroundings, or am I pulled and wooed by an earnest love for others?

Imprisoned, Paul could have understandably written for sympathy, or to see if his friends could help him out. Paul gives new meaning to "prison sentences." He gave his life away for others one prayer at a time, one stoke of his pen at a time. Paul was an amazingly compassionate man.