



GREATER THAN • COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY • COLOSSIANS 1-2

Greater Than Our Suffering

A guided conversation from the July 26, 2026 sermon by Kent Keller

SUMMARY

Kent began by asking a room full of people to close their eyes and point to true north. The hands went every direction. "We have a scattering of opinions here." Before GPS, he said, we used compasses — and God's Word is the compass that tells us which way we're actually heading, and whether we're off course.

Then he named the passage that has been his own compass for decades: Colossians 1:28-29. Paul writes from prison, and the first thing he says is startling — "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." Not endure. Rejoice. And then the line that has puzzled readers for two thousand years: "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

Kent was careful here. Paul is not suggesting the cross came up short. "Jesus' suffering accomplished our salvation, period. Our sufferings help accomplish his mission of reaching the world for Christ." He told of a mother who dies in childbirth — the child lives, but must then embrace all of life, the joys and the sorrows, or the sacrifice is lessened. So it is with the church.

From the paradox the sermon moved outward: a great proclamation ("we proclaim him" — not a better ethical system, a Person), a great process (admonishing and teaching everyone, so as to present everyone mature in Christ), and a great power ("striving according to his power" — agonizomai, the weightlifter's strain, but with strength that is not our own). The closing question was the opening one: what is your compass?

PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we come to this passage from a week of things that whisper in our ears and scream in our faces for our attention — things that would divert us from our true north. Speak words of truth to us now, and most especially words of Christ, the living Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

START

ICE BREAKER

Without looking at a phone: point to true north. Compare answers around the room. Then talk about a time you were genuinely lost — physically, or in a season of life. What finally got you oriented again?

COLOSSIANS 1:24-26 • ESV

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

COLOSSIANS 1:27-29 • ESV

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

COLOSSIANS 2:1-5 • ESV

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.

01 WHAT IS YOUR COMPASS?

Kent asked it twice — at the start and at the very end. "What guides your true north? It guides the course of your life and guides your day-to-day decisions every day." Answer it honestly for yourself before anyone else answers. What has actually been setting your direction lately?

02 REJOICE — NOT ENDURE.

Paul says "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake" from a prison cell. What is the difference between rejoicing in suffering and pretending it doesn't hurt? Where have you seen someone do the first without doing the second?

03 WHAT IS LACKING, AND WHAT ISN'T.

"Jesus' suffering accomplished our salvation, period." Nothing was missing from the cross. So what is Paul filling up? Talk through the difference between the payment for sin, which is finished, and the cost of carrying the news, which is still being paid.

04 A WHY BIG ENOUGH.

Kent quoted Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz: a person can endure almost anything as long as they have a why. Paul's why was the advance of the gospel. What is yours — and is it big enough for what you are currently carrying?

05 CHRIST IN YOU.

For ages this was hidden; now it is announced, and it turns out to be four words — "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Not Christ above you keeping score, or ahead of you waiting to see if you make it. What changes in a hard week if the hope is already inside you rather than out ahead of you?

06 JUST COME.

Kent invited a friend to his daughter's baptism and she panicked: what do I wear, what should I bring? He told her — relax, you don't bring anything, just come. "That's the gospel." Where have you quietly added an entry fee to a gospel that has never had one?

07 THE HARD HALF OF THE WARNING.

"We admonish every person. We warn every person." Kent said plainly that he does not like talking about hell — "it's not about what I like, it's about truth." How does a group like ours hold that warning and the invitation together, without softening either one?

08 STRIVING, BUT NOT ALONE.

Verse 29 is agonizomai — the weightlifter under the bar, the sprinter straining at the tape — and yet "according to his power, which mightily works within me." Most of us collapse one half into the other: grit our teeth and call it faithfulness, or go slack and call it grace. Which way do you lean, and what would the other half look like this week?

APPLY LIFE APPLICATION

The passage ends where discipleship begins: proclaim him, teach and warn, and keep walking so that everyone is presented mature in Christ. Kent's summary was simple — "Christ's church exists to make disciples." These are three ways to take a step this week.

- 1 **Name your why.** Take the hardest thing you are carrying right now and write one sentence: if God were doing something through this, what might it be? You are not being asked to like it. You are being asked to stop assuming it is meaningless.
- 2 **Tell someone "just come."** Think of one person who believes they have to clean themselves up first. Invite them to something — a service, a meal, this group — and say the quiet part out loud: you don't need to bring anything.
- 3 **Pick your half.** If you lean on grit, ask God this week for strength you don't have. If you lean on grace, choose one concrete act of obedience and actually do it. Report back to the group next time.

There are insights you only get while you're on the path. You can't get them online, or from a lecture, or from a podcast. Some things are only learned in the walking — so walk.

REMEMBER KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ God's Word is the compass; the question that decides a life is which direction you are actually facing.
- ▶ Jesus' suffering accomplished our salvation, period — our suffering serves his mission of reaching the world.
- ▶ A person can endure almost any what if they have a why; Paul's chains are why we have the letters.
- ▶ The mystery hidden for ages turns out to be four words: Christ in you, the hope of glory.
- ▶ We proclaim him — not a better system of ethics, a Person. You don't bring anything. Just come.
- ▶ We strive and strain and agonize — with a power that is not our own. — Kent Keller, on Colossians 1:24–2:5

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. — Colossians 1:28

PRAYER

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, your word is truth. Sanctify us in your truth — mold us, shape us, conform us more and more into the image of your Son. Make us fellow strugglers who keep walking, not in our power but in yours. In Jesus' name, amen.

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