

Back to Our Roots: Jesus-Centered
Colossians 1:15-23
Jordan Byrd

If you've ever played or watched someone play the game, Jenga—you know that the tower eventually ends up depending on one block. In life, it's very common to place our dependence on certain things. For example, do you find yourself depending on any of these? Your location (which country you live in, where you live). The leadership you're under (President, boss, pastor). Protection (laws, weapons, strength). Provision (job, income, resources at your disposal). Connection (internet, friends, family). A cause or passion (sports team's success, a social project, or hobby). Ability (education, skills, talent)

While we do functionally depend on these for our lives in some form or fashion, we're often tempted to make everything in our lives depend on them. And what we unfortunately discover is that they are unable to support that kind of weight. They're incapable of bringing about what we fully need. They're incapable of holding everything together, when life starts falling apart. They're incapable of giving us the lasting purpose that we long for.

But good news that I hope you encounter in God's words today in Colossians 1:15-23 is that Jesus can support that kind of weight. Jesus is like a Jenga tower resting on one bottom block, that can support all the blocks depending on it—to hold them up. Jesus is the stable foundation we need. Jesus holds life together, even when life starts wobbling. And Jesus gives us a far-reaching purpose to build toward. Because God has made known to us that **Everything depends on Jesus.**

When life feels like it's in decline, what will keep us rooted in the promises of God and His way? Our roots—the roots of our faith. The core doctrines of our faith are what hold us steady in a dry, barren, God-ignoring world. And one of those root doctrines is this: everything depends on Jesus. Jesus is at the center of everything. The existence of all things—seen and unseen—depends on Jesus. Our understanding of God depends on Jesus. Our understanding of ourselves depends on Jesus. In theological terms, this is called **Christocentric**—the teaching that everything revolves around and depends on Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the savior figure we all long for. It means God is most fully known in Christ Jesus. It means Jesus has been part of all that God has done since the very beginning. It means Jesus bridges the reality of death with the possibility of new life. It means Jesus is the blueprint of human life—human life lived in its fullness. It means Jesus is the agent of creation—of all things, including you and me. It means Jesus is the one holding everything together right now—our bodies, the earth, the atmosphere, and any semblance of good that we experience by no effort of our own. It means Jesus is the one rescuing, redeeming, and transforming human lives into resurrected life. A root doctrine of the Christian faith is this: Jesus is the main focus. **Everything depends on Jesus.**

And Colossians 1:15–23 (NIV) is one of the central passages of Scripture that bears witness to this doctrine. Colossians is a letter written by the early follower of Jesus, Saul of Tarsus—later

known as the apostle Paul. He wrote it while imprisoned, addressed to a congregation of Jesus-followers in the Greek city of Colossae.

Colossians 1:15-23 is a poetic passage giving a detailed vision of who Jesus is and how he is God: How he has been present and active since the beginning of time. How he fulfills the messianic promises of the Old Testament, saving and establishing God's kingdom for eternity. How he is the embodied presence of God on earth. How he is the blueprint for humanity's future.

Everything is from Jesus, through Jesus, and for Jesus. EVERYTHING—the whole of existence, the earth itself, invisible powers, the tiniest strand of DNA, the future—all of it originates in him, is held together by him, and finds its fulfillment in him. **Everything depends on Jesus.**

Let's dig a little deeper into three aspects that Paul highlights about Jesus in this passage that helps us see how everything depends on Jesus: **Everything is from Jesus, by Jesus, and for Jesus.**

First: From Jesus. I have three children: Pace, Towns, and Rhynn. And while there are many markers of who they are—their personalities, their interests, their gifts—one of the clearest markers of their identity is their relational status to me, their father. By nature of their birth, they are children—sons and a daughter—of their mother and me. By nature, their status as sons and daughter indicates their relationship with me, as their father. The same is true of Jesus.

Jesus is unique in that He is not just human, but also God. In Colossians 1, Paul identifies Jesus as the Son of the invisible God. By nature of being the Son of God, Jesus has a Heavenly Father. He is the embodied presence of the character of His invisible Father. Jesus is eternally the Son of God. He was not created. He has always existed. He has always been relationally a Son to God the Father. He shares all the qualities of Sonship, just as my children share qualities of my life because they are begotten of me.

A few glimpses of Jesus' identity as the begotten Son of God include the angel's announcement to Mary that she would miraculously conceive a child by the Holy Spirit. From **Luke 1:30-35 (NIV)**, But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "*The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*"

Beyond the angel's announcement to Mary, when Jesus surrenders himself to baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, God testifies to Jesus' identity as his Son. From **Matthew 3:16-17 (NIV)**, As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment

heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

Lastly, we have Jesus’ own testimony about his identity as the Son of God. From **John 5:16-19 (NIV)**, So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, *“My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”* For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but *he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.* Jesus gave them this answer: *“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”*

Second: By Jesus. Apple is a dominant product brand in the U.S., and about every year they have an event where they reveal new products and updates. The most recent iteration of that event just happened. I think this event gives us a helpful visual for the work of God that we encounter in the world. Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, leads the yearly Apple event and presents new products and updates. He is not the only one who does all the work to bring about these products, but he is the agent through whom they are visually and tangibly revealed. This is similar to what we see in Jesus.

Colossians 1:16 (NIV) highlights how ALL things were created by Jesus. Elsewhere in the New Testament we encounter similar testimony: From **John 1:1-3 (NIV)**, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

From **1 Corinthians 8:6 (NIV)**, ...for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through whom all things came* and through whom we live.

From **Hebrews 1:1-2 (NIV)**, In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and *through whom also he made the universe.*

Jesus was involved in the creation of all things—every... single... thing. All three Persons of the Trinity are involved in creation. Yet Jesus is the agent through whom creation is tangibly revealed. He even stepped into creation by taking on a created body. Jesus is the bridge between God’s eternal existence and created existence. He connects the uncreated with the created. Overall, Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, and his role in bringing about the creation of ALL things testifies that: **Everything depends on Jesus.**

As Jesus is embodiment of God’s nature taking-on his own creation, we see that Jesus is the tangible presence of God through whom all creation is held-together, as Colossians 1:17 (NIV) highlights, He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Jesus is the tangible presence of God, the one on whom all creation *depends*. As God is uncreated, and has always

existed, his nature is different than ours. Or maybe more accurately stated, our created nature is different from God's.

As we already saw Colossians 1:15 highlight, God is invisible. What this doesn't mean is that God isn't present. God is present, and he's present in an uncreated way. Unlike our reality. Created presence is all we know of presence in it's fullest. But Jesus is the bridge between this reality of God's nature, and the reality of created nature. Jesus is the IMAGE of the invisible God. Which is mind-blowing for us, as we only live in an imaged nature.

When my office space here in the church building use to be where Mitch's office currently is, my desk was positioned in a way that I could tell if someone was walking into the building by seeing the reflection on the window between the back of the auditorium and the foyer. There is a real person on the other side of the wall of the office, and the reflected image on the window allows me to see the person who's actually invisible to me at the moment. Scholar, N.T. Wright is where I originally encountered a similar illustration which he used—to help show how Jesus is the image of the invisible God we can't see. Just as the reflection *depends* on the real person to reveal who they are, all of creation depends on Jesus to reveal God's presence and hold it together. **When we look at Jesus, we see who God is.**

Third: For Jesus. If you've ever played with Playdough, you've probably used some kind of mold to shape it into something new. The mold is the origin of the image, but the Playdough takes on the shape of the image in different way. It's dependent on the mold for the original image, but also different. The Playdough's shape depends entirely on the mold for its form. Likewise, everything in creation depends on Jesus, the image of the mold of the invisible God, for its existence, order, and purpose. Jesus is OF God. But Jesus is also relationally different, in that he's the Son, and not the Father. But in Jesus you see the image of the Father, and in an embodied, tangible form.

In Jesus, we encounter God in imaged and created, embodied form. In Jesus, we encounter God taking on his creation, in a way that's understandable and interactable by his creation—by you and me. Elsewhere in the New Testament we see this reality testified as well: From **John 1:14 (NIV)**, *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

From **Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV)**, ...have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by *taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness*. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

From the next chapter of Colossians, **Colossians 2:9 (NIV)**, For in Christ *all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form....*

From **Hebrews 2:14-15 (NIV)**, Since the children have flesh and blood, *he too shared in their humanity* so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

From Colossians 1:19 (NIV), Paul doubles down that all of God's fullness dwells in Jesus. From this further testimony we can see that Jesus is God in human form. Jesus is what it looks like for God to take on created flesh. Jesus holds together God's presence in the created realm.

Beyond Jesus being the bridge between God's uncreatedness to our created nature, Jesus is also the focal point of human history. All history starts with Jesus – at creation; and moves toward Jesus – when Jesus is born; and moves away from Jesus – when he conquers death, making eternal life possible for all. Jesus is the linchpin, or interpretive key for making sense of humanity's story. Creation began with Jesus. Creation turned away from Jesus. Jesus steps into creation to turn creation back to him. Jesus makes it possible for creation to stay united to him. Colossians 1:20 (NIV) points to this when Paul writes through Jesus God is reconciling all things to himself; and how the death of Jesus is the turning point of that process.

Jesus specifically points to the reality that he is the focal point of history, and what God is doing in the world. From **John 5:39 (NIV)**, You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. *These are the very Scriptures that testify about me....*

Paul connects Jesus' impact on all of creation in **Romans 8:22-23 (NIV)**, ...the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. Creation pulled away from Jesus, who created it. Jesus stepped into creation to redeem it. And creation is waiting for the finalization of that redemption. But any semblance of redemption is DEPENDENT on Jesus.

From these, we see further testimony that history, creation, and our own lives all pivot on Jesus. Without Him, the story of the world cannot hold together. From His role in creation, to His embodiment of God, to His work of redemption, everything in existence *depends* on Jesus. **Everything depends on Jesus.**

My kids play with Legos a lot. Each Lego set usually comes with a set of instructions—a blueprint—showing how it was designed to be built. In a similar way, Jesus is the blueprint for our lives. But here's the problem: like with Legos, we've often disassembled what Jesus created, rearranging it into something different from the original design. Yet Jesus has stepped into the mess we've made, revealing the original blueprint for life lived to the fullest. In fact, he perfected the design. By exhausting sin and death—and being raised by God's power—Jesus opened the way to a more perfect life. His resurrection is the hope, the sign held out to the world, of the future that's possible when we live in him.

Paul captures this in Colossians 1. First, he says that all creation finds its ultimate purpose in Jesus—for all things were created for him (Colossians 1:16, NIV). Second, Paul highlights how Jesus' death and resurrection make possible our reconciliation and hope: ...[God] has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from *the hope held out in the gospel*. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven (Colossians 1:22-23). Through faith, our lives can be united with Jesus' resurrected life. This is the eternal life of fellowship and fullness that Jesus has always known—even before creation—in loving relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus prayed in **John 17:24 (NIV)**: Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me *because you loved me before the creation of the world*. Before creation even began, Jesus shared perfect fellowship with the Father and the Spirit.

We glimpse this again at his baptism (**John 3:16-17, NIV**), where we see that the Holy Spirit is part of this fellowship. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." The Holy Spirit is part of this fellowship of love that makes-up God's nature in eternity, before creation came to be. This eternal fellowship of love is at the very core of God's nature. And it's out of this love—overflowing between Father, Son, and Spirit—that creation came into being.

Paul reminds us in Colossians 1:17–18 that creation exists for Jesus. You and I exist out of the Father's love for his Son, and it's into that same fellowship of love that Jesus now invites us. **Romans 6:5 (NIV)** says: For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. Jesus is the blueprint of what full and lasting life looks like. This is the life he calls us to experience with him.

As he said in **John 10:10 (NIV)**—the verse that shapes our mission as a church: The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*. The fullness of life is only found in Jesus. He is the true blueprint for living fully. Our future hope—of perfected, resurrected, eternal life with God—*depends* entirely on being united with Jesus. **Everything depends on Jesus.**

In a world that constantly tempts us to depend on other authorities and powers, Colossians 1:15–23 confronts us with a disruptive truth: nothing in this life escapes *dependence* on Jesus. Whether we acknowledge him or not, our very existence—our next breath, our next day—is possible only because of Jesus, who created it all and continues to hold it all together. And here's the good news: there is an alternative to the emptiness we encounter when everything else we think is most dependable falls through. Jesus is the hope we were made to *depend* on. Without him, we face eternal death. With him, we find eternal life. **Everything depends on Jesus.**

Confess your dependence on Jesus in baptism.

If you're wrestling with who to depend on for life, will you consider that Jesus is the One you need? Will you acknowledge, affirm, and confess that Jesus is the Christ—your Savior, your Creator, your Sustainer, your Redeemer? Paul writes in **Romans 10:9 (NIV)**: “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” And earlier in that same letter, Paul points us to baptism as the moment of uniting our life with Jesus through faith, being immersed in his name, and beginning the journey of transformation into the perfect blueprint of life we encounter in Jesus. It is through faith in this good news, as Paul says in Colossians 1:23, that we remain rooted in Christ, keeping him at the center of all we do. So will you confess and be united with Jesus by faith—acknowledging that your life, along with everything else in creation, *depends* on Jesus? *Everything depends on Jesus.*

Re-confess your dependence on Jesus.

And if you've already acknowledged, affirmed, and confessed this truth—if you've already united your life to Jesus—being immersed in his name, expressing your faith in him as the center of life—how are you keeping that truth front and center each day? This truth is the key to knowing who you are. The truth for how to live. The truth of a lasting hope that stretches beyond this fleeting world. Maybe you've doubted that everything depends on Jesus. If that's you, I invite you today to reaffirm your faith, to confess again that everything depends on him, and to ask him to help you live in full *dependence*—as if your life *depends* on it. Because it does. It always has. It does now. And it will forever.

Everything depends on Jesus.