



COLOSSIANS

STUDY GUIDE

COLOSSIANS STUDY GUIDE

A 9-week study on Colossians

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How to Use this Guide

This guide is designed to be used in the context of a Small Group, but has content for personal study outside of the group as well as for group discussion and application. There are a number of resources listed each week to help you get the most out of your time in Colossians, but what you choose to use is entirely customizable. Use the resources and questions in the way that works best for you and your group. This guide may also be used in the context of one-on-one or a small group (3-5 people) discipleship relationships. The discussion/application questions will be useful even if someone has not done the personal study questions beforehand, although spending personal time before meeting obviously helps.

Here are some suggestions for using the various sections of each week's study.

- The **printed text** in each week's study is available for you to make observations from. Don't passively read the passage – mark it up as you study it! Use a highlighter, write comments, and take notes as you read. Dig into the passage and see what you find. There may be some weeks that members of your group share what they've observed. This can be helpful as you get to hear observations you might have missed on your own.¹
- The **for further study** section provides resources for 2-3 of the topics covered in that particular passage. Resources may include other Bible

1 There are a number of helpful books or online resources for how to do an Inductive Bible study or how to study a passage. Consider watching one of the "Look at the Book" labs from John Piper to see how he marks up a passage: desiringgod.org/labs.

verses, books, or past sermons from Pastor Mark Vroegop. Use these resources to dig even deeper into your understanding of the passage.

- Use the **prayer** section to help direct your prayer time. The suggestions are only a starting point and the list is definitely not exhaustive, or even a list of the “best” things to pray. Don’t let the sentence be the entirety of your prayer, but do use them as starter.
- The two biggest sections are the **Bible-study questions** (for personal study before you meet with others) and the **application questions** (for the group to discuss and apply when they meet together) sections. The **Bible-study questions** are designed to help you study, meditate, and think about the application of the passage before you talk about it as a group. Use the **application questions** to facilitate understanding the passage better and then to help one another apply it. We need to both **study** the Word and to **apply** the Word.
- The **group practice** section provides a couple of ideas for building community within your group as you live life together. Some of the ideas will help you cultivate basic practices of a healthy group while others may encourage the group to live out the heart of the passage together.
- Use the **personal practice** section as encouragement to take a next step in applying, responding to, and obeying what God teaches you in Colossians.

10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT COLOSSIANS

1. The Apostle Paul identifies himself as the author of Colossians (1:1; 4:18).
2. Epaphras likely planted the church at Colossae after bringing the gospel he heard under Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:10) back to his home city (1:7; 4:12).
3. Paul writes this letter from a Roman prison around 60-62 AD (4:16).
4. Colossae was a small but diverse city in Rome's Asia province, which corresponds to modern-day Turkey.
5. The Colossians were immersed in a cultural environment full of pluralism and syncretism. Most people borrowed bits and pieces from the religious and philosophical ideas of the day.
6. Throughout the book Paul hints at a "Colossian heresy." However, he focuses on Christ-centered, correct teaching rather than the content of the false teaching.
7. Whatever this false teaching is, it is "not according to Christ" (2:8), and it undermines the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus.
8. John Calvin summarizes Colossians as follows: "this Epistle . . . to express it in one word, distinguishes the true Christ from a fictitious one."²
9. Like other Pauline letters, the first half of this book builds a rich theology that the second half exhorts us to live out the truths that have been established.
10. Ephesians and Colossians are companion books, written around the same time, that have a lot of overlap and often help explain one another.

2 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 21 of Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 134.

“God’s purpose then, is to create a holy people in Christ. This he has done in principle, by dealing with sin on the cross and thus already achieving reconciliation. This he is doing in practice, by refashioning their lives according to the pattern of the perfect life, that of Christ (3:10). This he will do in the future, when that work is complete and the church enjoys fully that which at present it awaits in hope. The present process, which begins with patient Christian living and ends with the resurrection itself, will result in Christians being presented without shame or fear before God, as glad subjects before their king.”³

The opening section of this letter (1:1-8) isn’t something to skip over in order to get to “the real stuff.” Most NT books, including Paul’s letters, set a tone early on and hint at what’s to come. The introduction is the trailer that gives us a sneak-peek of what’s coming. In Colossians, right away we see three sets of threes. First, at the heart of the letter is the God we serve: Father (1:3), Son (1:3), and Holy Spirit (1:8). Second, this introduction focuses on the importance of the gospel. The gospel isn’t something we do, but a message of truth that is meant to be heard (1:6), understood (1:6), and learned (1:7). The third trio is a set of Christian virtues that demonstrate fruit: faith (1:4), love (1:4), and hope (1:5).

The introduction points us back to the context of God’s original purpose for humanity as it was spelled out in the garden - mankind was created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27) and then commanded to, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). Certainly this was a physical command, but we know the higher purpose in it was that people would spread the image of God and the glory of God as they filled

3 N.T. Wright, *Colossians & Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 83.

up the earth (Hab. 2:14). Unfortunately, sin quickly entered the picture and ruined everything, seemingly halting the purpose of God through His people (Gen. 3).

In Colossians, Paul notes that God is doing a noteworthy work by birthing churches in the Gentile world through the gospel. We see that God is now accomplishing His original plan through the Church. By the Spirit they are, “being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (3:10). The gospel is in the whole world, “bearing fruit and growing” (2:6). Through the kingdom of God all of creation is being brought under the dominion of Christ again (1:14, 20). The fruit ripening because of the gospel is intended to convince the Colossians that they have all they need in Jesus. But, just like Adam and Eve were tempted to look for something else—something they were told God had hidden from them—false teachers had slivered into the church and were whispering that there was something more that needed to be added to Jesus in order to arrive at true spiritual knowledge.

The Church participates in the new creation and Paul writes to hold up the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. He admonishes the Colossians to look nowhere else for the fullness of salvation, for knowledge, and for life. Colossians was written out of Paul’s desire to bring us to maturity in Christ by redirecting our eyes to His matchless glory. The first section (1:1-8) sets the stage for this goal by thanking God for, and showing the church, the good work He has started in them. All the Colossians need to do is stay rooted in Jesus to continue to thrive.

GRIPPED BY THE GOSPEL—COLOSSIANS 1:1-8

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

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Similar passages: 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Eph. 1:15-23; Phil. 1:3-11; 1 Thess. 1:2-10.
- In Christ: Col. 1:28; Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 5:12-21; 6:1-14.
- Faith, hope, and love together in NT: Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 4:2-5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Heb. 6:10-12; 1 Pet. 1:21-22.
- Thanksgiving: Ps 35:18; 100:4; 109:30; Luke 8:39; Jn. 4:39; Eph. 1:16; 5:20; 2 Thess. 2:13-14.
- Listen to the College Park sermon series entitled “The Core” at yourchurch.com/sermons. There are three sermons that cover Col. 1:1-8.

WAYS TO PRAY

- Pray for open doors and boldness in sharing the good news about Jesus Christ.
- Thank God for the ways He’s given you grace and blessed you.
- Ask the Spirit to help you put roots down into the gospel so that fruit blossoms in your life.
- Pray for the ministry of the church and pray for ministry opportunities that people in your group have at work, home, or in their neighborhoods.
- Thank God for giving you a new identity in Christ and ask for eyes to see who you are in Him.

BIBLE-STUDY QUESTIONS (To answer individually before meeting with the group)

1. Which words were emphasized, repeated, or connected in this passage? What are 2-3 themes or key ideas that emerge?
2. Col. 1:2 provides three descriptions of the believer: “saints,” “faithful brothers and sisters,” and “in Christ.” What do you think these terms highlight about the identity of Christians?
3. What do you learn about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in 1:1-8? For example, what actions are they doing, how are they relating to us, and what does it say about them?
4. Paul sees “hope” as a concrete, objective inheritance secured for us in the future. Look up Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:12-14; Col. 1:12; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:3-5.

What is the nature of our “hope” and “inheritance?” How might these truths help you endure the hardships of life?

5. List the reasons Paul is thankful for about the Colossians.
6. Read Col. 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15-17; and 4:2. What do you notice about giving thanks? When should you give thanks? To whom should you give thanks? For what reasons should you give thanks?
7. Summarize Paul’s main idea from 1:1-8 in one sentence.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (To discuss as a group)

1. What are two things, in life right now, that you are thanking God for?
2. Paul begins a section of prayer (1:3-14) by thanking God. Why are we slow to give thanks to God or to be grateful in general? How can we cultivate gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise in our prayer life, our Bible study, and our conversations together as believers?
3. As we give thanks to God, how can we acknowledge and learn about God’s character rather than just seeing a blessing? For example, if I thank God for His strength given to me during a trial, what can I learn about God?
4. The Church is pictured as a grace-receiving and grace-giving community. They receive grace from God (1:2), they learn the gospel of grace (1:7), and the gospel transforms them so that they can give grace to one another (1:8). How does the gospel help us be a grace-giving community? How can this small group create a grace-giving culture so that struggles are shared rather than covered – where we fight sin together, rather than pretend it doesn’t exist?
5. We see a connection in this passage between faith in God and love for one another. How do the two relate to and influence one another? How (specifically) does walking with God help you in relationships with people in your life?
6. Read these passages together and discuss how you might summarize the gospel based on them: Rom. 3:21-26; 1 Cor. 15:1-5; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Eph. 2:1-9. What is the heart of the message, what is our response, and what are some of the results?
7. The gospel will be rehearsed often in Colossians. Share with the group one area of life that they can purposefully be speaking the gospel into. (For example:

fear, anxiety, selfishness, guilt, apathy, rebellious autonomy, etc.) How does the gospel speak into those areas?

GROUP PRACTICES (How to live the passage out together)

- Share with your group in 1-2 minutes how the gospel was shared with you. Who shared it with you? What drew you to Christ? How did you respond? If you're still investigating Jesus, share what is compelling and what keeps you from believing. If your group is larger, break up into groups of three or four to answer these questions. Or, as a group have one person share their testimony in more detail each week.
- Have each person write their name, contact info (email and/or phone number), one praise, and 2-3 prayer requests on an index card. Share your card with someone by either pairing up to talk, or exchanging cards (men receiving men's cards and women receiving women's cards). In the following week, pray over the card you received and think about sending an email or text, or calling the person to let them know how they're being prayed for.

PERSONAL PRACTICES (Next steps & application)

- Write out your story (testimony) of how the gospel of grace was shared with you. How did you see your sin and turn to faith in Christ? Think about writing something that could be verbally shared in 3-4 minutes.
- Begin writing a list of things you're thankful for, including spiritual blessings. Start by writing down three things you want to thank God for.
- Make a list of five people in your life who are not Christians. Begin praying for them by name and ask God to allow you to be an Epaphras who shares the gospel with them (evangelism) and disciples them.
- Write 1-2 sentences about how you want to apply what you've learned and discussed this week. It may be a promise to cling to, a truth to believe, an action to take, or something you want to put off (fight) or put on (practice).

WEEK TWO

PRAYING WITH PAUL

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

“Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him... because our definition understands prayer as a response to the knowledge of God, it means that prayer is profoundly altered by the amount and accuracy of that knowledge.... The clearer our understanding of who God is, the better our prayers.”⁴

It doesn't take long after Christmas before many of us begin rethinking our Christmas list. What you were given didn't prove to be quite what you were hoping for, and the realization sets in: there are other things that you'd really much rather have – and may actually *need*. The problem usually isn't that people are bad gift-givers or have horrible taste (although this may also be true!), but that we are bad askers. We don't always know what to ask for or we ask for something doesn't last longer than a week.

I see a similar problem in my own prayer life at times. Often, I don't know what to ask for. Or I ask for things that I really need. For example, time and time again when praying for myself or others I ask for good health but neglect to ask that God would show Himself as a Helper in the midst of poor health. Both prayers are okay to pray, but the former is really just seeking to avoid discomfort, while the latter gets at knowing God in a deeper way.

In a sense, this is what we learn from Col. 1:9-14 as Paul offers a prayer “report” for the church he so dearly loves. Notice that he prays for **things of the heart leading to maturity in Christ**. In other words, “In one’s practice of prayer, the

4 Tim Keller, *Prayer*, (New York: Dutton, 2014), 48.

fundamental distinction is not primarily the one between physical versus spiritual concerns, but between the focus on oneself and the focus on God.”⁵

How can you make praying for others and praying in step with God’s heart a greater focus? God never wearies of your prayers. He invites you to come to Him and to open your heart to Him. Tim Keller defines prayer as a, “personal, communicative response to the knowledge of God.”⁶ Seeing God in the Word will motivate seeking Him in prayer. This week, pray along with Paul as you pray together as a group. Pray to know Christ, to grow in Christ, and to show (reflect) Christ.

PRAYING WITH PAUL—COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

Last week’s big idea (Col. 1:1-8): *The gospel of Christ creates, unites, and grows God’s people.*

⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. ¹¹May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- **Similar passages:** Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Phil. 1:9-11.
- **Paul asks for prayer:** Col. 4:3; Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1.
- **Walk worthy:** Eph. 4:1; 5:10; Phil. 1:27; 2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Thess. 4:1.

5 David Pao, *Colossians & Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 79.

6 Keller, *Prayer*, 45-46.

- **Redemption:** Col. 2:11-15; Acts 10:43; Rom. 3:21-26; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:11-12; 1 Pet. 1:18-19.
- Listen to the College Park sermon series entitled “The Core” at yourchurch.com/sermons. There is one sermon that covers Col. 1:9-14.
- Read *Praying the Bible* by Don Whitney or *Prayer* by Tim Keller for help in prayer.

WAYS TO PRAY INTO THIS TEXT

- Pray that you will grow in your personal knowledge of God (1:9).
- Pray that the truth you learn will take root in your heart and bear fruit in your life (1:10).
- Ask God to strengthen you by His power and might and pray that you won’t try to live in your own strength. Pray about a specific area of your life where you sense need (1:11).
- Thank God for specific blessings you have from God in Christ.
- Praise God for the redemption you have, by God’s grace and in Christ’s work.

BIBLE-STUDY QUESTIONS (To answer individually before meeting with the group)

1. Which words were emphasized, repeated, or connected in this passage? What are 2-3 themes or key ideas that emerge?
2. What are some ways you can pray for a “knowledge of God’s will?” Read Eph. 1:17; 1 Cor. 2:12; and Col. 1:9-10. What is the primary focus of knowledge that Paul is praying for?
3. The right knowledge of God—revealed in Christ, through the Word—is a key theme of Colossians. Read the following verses about wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, and record your observations: 1:9 (x3), 10, 28; 2:2 (x2), 3 (x2), 23; 3:10, 16; 4:5.
4. Read Ps. 86:16; Col. 1:11, 29; Eph. 1:19; 3:16-21; 6:10; Phil. 4:13. How do these verses help you understand we should live according to God’s strength instead of our own? How can you live in His strength?
5. In the prayer found in 1:9-14, why is Paul giving thanks to God? Look for statements about what you have in Christ.

6. What do the different metaphors of salvation Paul uses here (deliverance, rescue, redemption, forgiveness) teach us about Christ's work for us? How do we apply these gospel truths to our lives and walk in them each day?
7. In 1:9-14, what do you see about (a) God's works or actions on your behalf, (b) God's desires for you, and (c) how you might respond?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (To discuss as a group)

1. What keeps you from praying? What are reasons we tend to put it off?
2. How do you think the knowledge of God and His will (1:9) helps us live a fruitful life as described in 1:10?
3. How do we try to live in our own strength and what are the results? How can we walk and live by God's power in us rather than on our own?
4. What are the ramifications—now and eternally—of 1:13-14 if you're in Christ? Who does the believer belong to? How do you think knowing Christ (who He is and what He's done) can motivate your maturity more than mere discipline and hard work?
5. Why is it better to tell people *specifically* how we are praying for them instead of just saying we're praying for them? How can we grow in praying for people right away, on-the-spot, rather than saying I *will* pray for you?
6. What attributes and actions of God do you see in this passage? How do these lead you to worship and prayer?
7. What stands out to you in this prayer? How does it motivate your own prayer or help you see a way that you might pray differently?

GROUP PRACTICES (How to live the passage out together)

- As you begin your time together, share one thing you were thankful to God for during the previous week (cf. Col. 1:3). Build this practice of a rhythm of gratitude into your own life and into your small group gatherings.
- At the end of your time together, take a moment to think about what verse or phrase best applies to a prayer need in your life. Or, consider a prayer request similar to this text that your group members can pray about. As everyone

shares their requests (together or in smaller groups), write them down and commit to praying over the course of the week.

PERSONAL PRACTICES (Next steps & application)

- Memorize Col. 1:9-14 this week. Meditate on the Scripture and let it help your prayers for and with others.
- Pray this prayer, or parts of it, for someone in your life. Let them know specifically how you are praying for them through a text, email, or conversation.
- Commit to intentionally pray for others more in the next week. If someone shares a need, burden, or struggle, politely ask if you can pray for them.
- Write 1-2 sentences how you want to apply what you've learned and discussed this week. It may be a promise to cling to, a truth to believe, an action to take, or something you want to put off (fight) and put on (practice).

WEEK THREE

JESUS' SUPREMACY AND SUFFICIENCY

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

“Christ [is] the very essence of all delights and pleasures, the very soul and substance of them. As all the rivers are gathered into the ocean, which is the congregation or meeting place of all the waters in the world; so Christ is that ocean in which all true delights and pleasures meet... His excellencies are pure and unmixed; he is a sea of sweetness without one drop of gall.”⁷

Paul began Colossians with a double barreled gratitude: thanks (to God) and affirmation (to the church) for the fire lit in Colossae (1:3-8). In our second section he moves from thanking God for what He started, to praying that He'd keep the fire stoked (1:9-14). The next section of Colossians (1:15-20) is all about the soul-stirring supremacy of Jesus. It's almost as if Paul mentioned the work of redemption in verses 12-14 and now he can't help but go on talking about Jesus. We shouldn't be surprised. Colossians is all about the glory, supremacy, and preeminence of the exalted Jesus, and jaw-dropping wonder in the truth that we're being re-made in His image.

It's helpful to know a bit of the historical context for Colossians. The Colossian church was tempted to affirm Jesus as a good place to start, but then add a few more ingredients into the mix. Paul wrote this letter to convince the Colossians that Jesus isn't just one important person among many, but that He's supreme and sufficient all by Himself. The idea of “Jesus and something else” or, “Jesus and a next step,” is incorrect. It's just Jesus. This whole section is Paul's outburst of theological worship over the mere thought of who Jesus is.

7 John Flavel, *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel* (London: Baynes and Son, 1820), 2:213.

It's as if Paul is saying, "Let me fill you in on Jesus, just in case you've forgotten some things." He points to the absolute and unrivaled supremacy of Jesus Christ over creation and over the new creation (the Church). Some scholars believe that this section served as an early Christian hymn or poem. It's hard to tell for sure, but what we do know is that Paul puts a right theology of the person and work of Jesus Christ at the center of his faith. There are a lot of things involved in the Christian walk, but none of them are as important as rightly knowing about Jesus. **Right knowing about Jesus leads to right worship of Him and right obedience to Him.**⁸

JESUS' SUPREMACY AND SUFFICIENCY—COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Last week's big idea (Col. 1:9-14): *Pray to know Christ, grow in Christ, and show Christ*

¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

¹⁶ *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.* ¹⁷ *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* ¹⁸ *And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.* ¹⁹ *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,* ²⁰ *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

²¹ *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,* ²² *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,* ²³ *if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

8 See Appendix 2 for a list of statements about Jesus' person and work in the book of Colossians.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- **Parallel passages:** Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:1-11; Heb. 1:1-12.
- **Jesus as the Head:** Col. 1:18; 2:10, 19; Eph. 1:22; 4:15; I Cor. 11:3.
- **Christ's blood for our sins:** Rom. 3:21-26; Heb. 9:11-28; 1 Pet. 1:18-21; 2:24; 3:18; Is. 53.
- Read a book that points to Jesus: *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* by John Piper; *Gospel Deeps* by Jared Wilson; *Through the Looking Glass* by Kris Lundgaard; *The King's Cross* by Tim Keller.
- Listen to the College Park sermon series entitled "The Core" at yourchurch.com/sermons. There are four sermons that covers Col. 1:15-23.

WAYS TO PRAY INTO THIS TEXT

- Give praise to Jesus for the glorious actions and attributes mentioned.
- Pray that Jesus would be big in your mind so that you think of Him rightly and intimately.
- Ask Jesus to be at the center of everything in your life, including things that seem out of control.
- Thank God for provision so that you can be holy, reconciled to Him, and at peace with Him.
- Ask God to keep you rooted and walking in the gospel daily.

BIBLE-STUDY QUESTIONS (To answer individually before meeting with the group)

1. Which words were emphasized, repeated, or connected in this passage? What are 2-3 themes or key ideas that emerge?
2. What verses/phrases in this passage focus on the person of Christ? What verses/phrases focus on Christ's work?
3. Look up these verses: John 1:14, 18; 14:9; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; Heb. 1:1-3. Why is Jesus able to perfectly reveal God to us? How does looking at Jesus in the NT help us think rightly about God the Father?
4. "Firstborn" refers to first in rank instead of first born in time. Read Col. 1:15, 18; Ex. 4:22; Ps. 89:27; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:1-6. What are some things Paul lists in Col. 1:15-20 that Jesus is supreme over?

5. If someone denied that Jesus was fully God, how might Col. 1:15-20 help you better explain to them who Jesus is?
6. Why does Paul spend so many consecutive verses talking about the person and work of Jesus (1:13-21)? Why are these truths so important for the Christian?
7. What images does Paul use in 1:20 and 1:22 to describe the physical nature of His death? What are some of the results of Christ's sacrificial death mentioned in 1:13-14 and 1:20-22?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (To discuss as a group)

1. If Jesus is the image of God, how can what we learn about Jesus in the New Testament show us what our Father is like? Why is this important?
2. "All things were created *through* him and *for* him" (1:16). Read Rom. 11:36; and Eph. 3:20-21. What does it mean that all things are created (1) through Him and (2) for Him? How can this help you see Christ's glory in the world around you more?
3. In verses 15-23, what attribute or action of Jesus stand out the most to you? How does that attribute or action apply to your life right now?
4. Paul talks about both who we "once were" apart from Christ (1:21), and who we "now" are in Christ (1:22). Why do we need to remind ourselves daily of how the gospel changes us and what is true of us in Christ now? How do these reminders both strengthen our faith in Christ and promote growth in Christ?
5. Verse 23 characterizes our walk as, "stable, steadfast, and not shifting," from the gospel. What things in your life pull you away from Christ? In what areas are you tempted to turn to "functional" gods for what you want or need?
6. How does seeing the supreme glory of Jesus' person (1:15-19) and the sacrificial love in His work (1:20-23), "ignite a passion to follow Jesus"? What's one thing you can do this week to keep Christ's glory over all things and His grace to you in mind on a personal level?
7. Most of us can likely acknowledge that Jesus should play a more central role in our lives. What keeps you from pursuing Him more intimately or letting Him

control your life? How do you want to grow as a disciple or see yourself mature in Christ?

GROUP PRACTICES (How to live the passage out together)

- Split up into pairs or groups of 3-4 to pray. Pick one item from the “Personal Practices” section that you want to try this week as an application. Share which one you picked with the people you’re praying with as an opportunity for accountability and encouragement.

PERSONAL PRACTICES (Next steps & application)

- Col. 1:21-22 frames our stories in terms of who we “once were” apart from Christ and who we “now” are in Christ. Write down 4-5 things that described you spiritually, before Christ. Then draw a line through those words and write down what is true of you, in Christ, now. Here’s an example:

~~Unloved~~

Beloved

~~Addict~~

Set free

~~Ruled by my flesh~~

Empowered by God’s Spirit

~~Empty~~

Made whole

- Encourage someone with a reminder of Christ’s supremacy over whatever circumstance they may be facing and His sufficiency for any need they may have.
- Continue praying through 1:9-14 for yourself or for others.
- Write 1-2 sentences how you want to apply what you’ve learned and discussed this week. It may be a promise to cling to, a truth to believe, an action to take, or something you want to put off (fight) and put on (practice).

WEEK FOUR

MARVELING AT JESUS LEADS TO MATURING IN JESUS

COL. 1:24-2:5

“Paul’s focus here is on how God’s new covenant people are completely identified with their representative, Christ, and how that new identity gives hope for the future. Paul often speaks of Christians as those who are ‘in Christ’ (see 1:2), but only rarely does he reverse the imagery and refer to Christ ‘in us’ (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17). But the point of both expressions is the same, stressing the intimate relationships between Christ and his people and the way in which, because of their relationship, Christ fully represents us. It is because of this that we can have the hope of glory, that is, the certainty that we will experience final glory (cf. Rom. 5:2)... Paul is again piling up words in order to hammer home the truth that Christ, and Christ alone, is the source of every conceivable bit of spiritual knowledge worth having.”⁹

On the heels of looking at Jesus’ supremacy and sufficiency over (1) creation (1:15-17), (2) over the Church (1:18-20), and (3) over the Christian (1:21-23), Paul naturally jumps to applications in ministry within the Church. If Christ is Lord over the Church, then as His apostle (1:1), Paul’s purpose is to keep pointing the Church to Jesus. This not only gives us a picture of Paul’s ministry, it also exemplifies what it looks like for all of us to live on mission by seeing others come to know Christ and mature in Him.

9 Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 159, 167.

In 1:24-2:5, Paul remains focused on the glory of Jesus. He shocks us with the fact that our union with Christ means that He suffers when the Church suffers (1:24). He says that as the Word is made known, and we see God's plan for the nations fully revealed, that the plan is for Jew and Gentile *alike* to be in relationship with God (1:25-27). This revelation tells us that **Christ** defines the people of God—as opposed to an ethnic or national distinctive—and that Christ actually dwells within His people (1:27). One effect of this truth is that our labor of love and attempts to minister grace is done in His power and not our own (1:29).

We enter into this labor of love for the goal of seeing people mature in Christ (1:28). People mature as we proclaim Christ, and as we warn them to avoid anything not according to. We refute what is false and dangerous, but even more so we point people to the glory of Jesus as we teach them. And why wouldn't we? Although others offer their own theories of wisdom and claims of knowledge (2:4, 8), Christ is the One in whom **all** wisdom, knowledge, and understanding is found. He doesn't just *offer* wisdom and truth—He *is* wisdom and truth (Jn. 14:6).

So, the Church (corporately) and individual Christians are those who have their hearts and minds set steadfastly on Christ alone. This is how we mature together; as we revere Him we will reflect Him. This is also how the body of Christ is united in love and strength together (2:2-3). In this passage we will see that the Church's mission is to see people mature in Jesus. The means of maturity is proclaiming Jesus. We must be Christ-centered and focused on the Word so that people see and savor the God-man Jesus Christ, not merely as a belief, a doctrine, or a religious idea, but as a Person. It is knowing Him and following as His disciples that transforms us into Christ's image. **Marveling at Jesus leads to maturing in Jesus.** The beauty of evangelism and discipleship is that we have an opportunity to multiply that maturity as we pour into one another's lives.

MARVELING AT JESUS LEADS TO MATURING IN JESUS—COL. 1:24-2:5

Last week's big idea (Col. 1:15-23): *Jesus is supreme over Creation and the Church.*

²⁴ 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, ²⁵ 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, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and gener-

ations but now revealed to his saints.²⁷ 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.²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

2 ¹For 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, ²that 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, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵For 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.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- **Rejoicing in suffering:** Acts 9:16; Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 1:5-6; 4:10-12; Phil. 2:16-18; 1 Thess. 3:7; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:10.
- **Christ in you:** Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17
- Listen to the College Park sermon series entitled "The Core" at yourchurch.com/sermons. There are three sermons that cover Col. 1:24-2:5.

WAYS TO PRAY INTO THIS TEXT

- Thank God for the wisdom and knowledge you have in Christ.
- Pray for opportunities to proclaim Jesus in your life and in your words to others this week.
- Ask God to help you depend on His strength as you work and struggle, instead of attempting things in your own strength.
- Pray that you will grow in grasping the glory of who Christ is and in understanding why He is the hope of glory.

BIBLE-STUDY QUESTIONS (To answer individually before meeting with the group)

1. Which words were emphasized, repeated, or connected in this passage? What are 2-3 themes or key ideas that emerge?
2. Look up Acts 9:16; 2 Cor. 1:5-6; 4:10-12; Phil. 2:16-18; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:10. What are some of the reasons Paul rejoices in suffering?
3. “Mystery” in the New Testament refers to something that is somewhat hidden in the Old Testament, but revealed in the New Testament. What truths does Paul refer to as a mystery in Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3; 1 Cor. 2:6-7; 15:51; Eph. 2:11-22; 3:9?
4. How does Paul unpack, “Christ in us,” in Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:24? Why is it important to know that we are “in Christ” and that He is “in us?”
5. Compare Col. 1:24-2:5 with Eph. 4:9-16. What words and ideas are shared in these two passages? What does maturity look like in each passage? What causes maturity to happen (in part)?
6. What are the effects of proclaiming Christ and teaching the Word (see Col. 1:27, 28; 2:2, 4-5)?
7. Read Prov. 2:4-5 and 3:5-7. How might the Old Testament emphasis on wisdom relate to Christ as the One in whom all wisdom and knowledge is found (see John 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Col. 2:2-3)?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (To discuss as a group)

1. One implication of Col. 1:24 is that our sufferings are Christ’s sufferings. See Rom. 8:17; Acts 9:4; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13. How might this truth strengthen you while suffering or walking through trials?
2. There’s a connection between our suffering and opportunities we have to make Christ seen and the Word known. How does suffering provide such an opportunity? How do we endure afflictions while cultivating a mind focused on Christ’s glory and ministering to others through the affliction?
3. Read Col. 1:24-2:5 and Eph. 4:11-16. What does it mean to mature in Christ? How does Paul say we grow or help others mature in Christ? What do you think maturity looks like for you personally?

4. Read Eph. 3:16-19; Col. 2:2; 3:15 about unity in love. How can the church be united by Christ's love for us? How can the church be united by our love for one another?
5. College Park's three-fold strategy for igniting a passion to follow Jesus is: Belong, Grow, Multiply. Where do you see these things show up in 1:24-2:5? How can your group help one another live this strategy out?
6. When and why do you start to trust your own wisdom rather than God's? How can you lean into Christ as the One who gives understanding, knowledge, and wisdom? What practical things can you do to grow in this area?

GROUP PRACTICES (How to live the passage out together)

- Write down the name of someone(s) you want to be intentional about "proclaiming" Christ to, either for their salvation or for their maturity. How can the group pray for you as you live out the gospel in your own life and point others to Jesus? Share with the people in your group how they can pray for both the person you wrote down and for you.
- Pair up with another person and share a heart-level prayer need in your life. Pray for one another, and discuss how you can encourage one another and hold one another accountable in the next week.

PERSONAL PRACTICES (Next steps & application)

- This text emphasizes seeing Christ through the Word. Commit yourself to spending time in the Bible this week with a focus on seeing and knowing Christ. Consider reading John or Ephesians.
- Send an encouraging email or letter to one of your pastors or elders, thanking them for serving the church and proclaiming the word.
- If you're not a church member, pray about becoming one to deepen your commitment and be knit together with other believers in love.
- Make an effort to reach out to at least one member of your small group to grab coffee or a meal. Part of strengthening your small group community is strengthening your individual friendships.

“If you have Christ, you have all of Christ, and to have all of Christ is to have free access to Christ’s all-sufficient grace. Grace is not a gate to fence us back from him. Grace is not a substitute for Christ. Grace does not stand between me and Christ. Rather, says Calvin, ‘All graces are bestowed on us through Christ.’ Grace is shorthand for the full and free access we have to all the merits and power and promises to be found in the person of our Savior (John 1:16-17; Eph. 2:7; 1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Cor. 8:9; 2 Tim. 2:1). Repeatedly, [John] Newton accents ‘the grace that is in Christ Jesus.’ Grace is a stream from Christ, the fountain of all grace, he writes.”¹⁰

As we journey further into Colossians, it’s helpful to look back and remember the sights along the way. Paul began with a prayer asking God to keep up the good work He started in the believers at Colossae (1:3-14). This prayer quickly led to thanksgiving to God for bringing people out of darkness through the redemption of Jesus. Our King came, conquered the enemy, released us from our imprisonment, and then safely carried us into a place of dwelling with Him. Once Paul started talking about his favorite subject (Jesus) it was hard to stop. As a result, the next chunk of his letter (1:15-23) sings the praises of Christ as the ruler of creation and the church.

This led to Paul’s summary of his ministry as seeking the maturity of believers by magnifying Christ in all of his teaching (1:28). The “mystery” of Christ in us and us in Christ—or, union with Christ—secures the believer with the firm hope that if Christ is theirs, they possess everything that is His. If you get Christ,

10 Tony Reinke, *John Newton on the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 46.

and all that belongs to Him, and everything He purchased, and everything He is, then you lack **nothing**. Paul wants the Colossians to grow in their knowledge of Christ so that they increasingly see how He is, and can be, sufficient for all of their desires, hopes, and needs (1:24-2:5).

In this section (2:6-15), Paul builds on everything we've seen about Christ as he encourages and exhorts the people to continue in Him. His instruction is basically, "Stay put and abide, so that you go deeper in Jesus. Don't listen to those who would tell you that Jesus gave you a "good start," but that you should now move on to bigger and better things." Paul's theology of Jesus aims to convince us that there are no bigger or better things than Jesus. The Christian never "outgrows" the gospel or moves past Jesus to something else. Instead, we can spend all of our days discovering the fullness of Jesus and delighting in how that fullness fills up our lives.

In this section of Scripture there are so many truths to cling to and find hope in. Paul paints a beautiful picture of an ugly event as he unpacks forgiveness at the cross. We see that the gospel not only saves us, but that it also sanctifies (matures and grows) us by making us new. Our life is so wrapped up in Jesus that both His *death* is ours and His *resurrection* is ours. This reality means that our sin and old identity are exchanged with who we are now in Christ. He is our head, our salvation, our forgiveness, our life, our fullness, our Lord, and the soil in which we flourish. **Let Paul convince you of the power in staying put in Jesus in these verses.** Plant yourself in Him. Feast on Him. Be built up in Him. Obey Him. Abide and remain in Him. Find life and forgiveness in Him. See Him in His fullness and then let His fullness overflow into every part of your life. As we'll see later (3:5ff), abiding in Him is the only way He transforms us from the inside out.

OVERFLOWING FROM HIS FULLNESS—COL. 2:6-15

Last week's big idea (Col. 1:24-2:5): *Marveling at Jesus leads to maturing in Jesus.*

⁶ *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,*
⁷ *rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as*
you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸ *See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty*
deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental
spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ *For in him the*

whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- **Circumcision of the heart:** Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Acts 7:51; Rom. 2:29; Phil. 3:3.
- **Made alive:** John 3:3; Rom. 6:4; 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:5.
- **Baptism:** Col. 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21; Gal. 3:23-29; Rom. 5:1 and 6:4; Acts 8:12-13.
- **Forgiveness:** Col. 2:13-15; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:21-26.
- Listen to the College Park sermon series entitled “The Core” at yourchurch.com/sermons. There are four sermons that cover Col. 2:6-15.

WAYS TO PRAY INTO THIS TEXT

- Pray that you would walk in Christ as you stay rooted in Him and are built up in Him.
- Pray that Christ will fill you so that you will spill out His fullness to those around you.
- Thank God for the forgiveness of sins available because of Christ’s death.
- Praise God for giving you new life as you participate in Christ’s resurrection.
- Ask God to help you forgive others as you’ve been forgiven.

BIBLE-STUDY QUESTIONS (To answer individually before meeting with the group)

1. In 2:6-15, find the, “in him/Christ,” and, “with him/Christ” phrases. What did you find? What are the implications of how Paul talks about union with Christ?
2. Look up these verses on the incarnation and write down 1-2 observations for each passage: John 1:14-18; 4:6; Gal. 4:4-5; Col. 2:9; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 1:1-3.
3. From Col. 2:6-15, list the actions of God done *for* us or *in* us. What do you learn about God through this text?
4. Read Col. 2:15; Eph. 6:12-13; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 5:4-5; Rev. 12:10-11. How has Jesus stripped spiritual forces of ultimate power? How do we participate in Christ’s victory?
5. Read Col. 1:13-14, 21-22; 2:13-14; Eph. 2:14-16; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24. Why did Christ die? How can the knowledge of complete forgiveness help us live in freedom?
6. Which phrases in this passage talk about the results of being raised with Christ? What are the effects of the resurrection in this life and in the future?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (To discuss as a group)

1. What do you think it means to, “walk in him,” and to be, “rooted and built up in him?” What things help you do this? What temptations or distractions keep you from walking in Him?
2. What are the implications of Jesus being/having the whole fullness of God (2:9)? If Jesus lacks nothing as God and possesses all fullness (2:9), how are we made full “in Him” (2:10)?
3. Throughout Colossians we see the fullness, sufficiency, and glory of Christ. How do we experience the fullness of who Jesus is in our own lives? How can we lean into and abide in His fullness?
4. Col. 2:6-10 focuses on how we’re filled up in Christ, and 2:11-15 focuses on how our old self is stripped away in Christ. Why do we need to both starve our flesh and feed on Christ?

5. Throughout the New Testament, resurrection is linked with God's power to give new life (cf. Eph. 1:19-22; Rom. 8:11; Phil. 3:10). What are some "dead" or "hopeless" situations right now where you want to see God's power at work?
6. Col. 2:11-15 teaches us that through Christ's work and our union with Him by faith, we can be forgiven and be made new (resurrected). How does this gospel of forgiveness and new life motivate you toward maturity in Christ? How do we practically live in light of the cross and the resurrection?
7. Read these verses on baptism: Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21; Gal. 3:23-29; Rom. 5:1 and 6:4; Acts 8:12-13. From these texts, how are faith and baptism are related? What is pictured in baptism?

GROUP PRACTICES (How to live the passage out together)

- Meet together as men and women (or in groups of 2-3) and share one temptation/distraction that is hindering you from growing deeper roots in Christ. Share one way that you'd like to take those roots deeper to mature this week. Encourage and exhort one another in this throughout the week.
- Have each person in your group share one area of life that they'd like to see God's resurrection power bring life to (whether that be in their heart, in a relationship, in an area of spiritual disciplines, in a circumstance, in a struggle, in a hopeless situation, etc.). Spend time praying over these things as a group.

PERSONAL PRACTICES (Next steps & application)

- Think about where you get wisdom, knowledge, and truth from. Are there any sources (books, TV shows, media, friendships, religions) that are not according to Christ and could be leading you away from the authority of the Word?
- Baptism is commanded as an essential step for believers in the New Testament. It does not save or justify the believer, but it is sign of the new covenant God's people participate in. If you haven't been baptized, talk to your small group leader, an elder, or a pastor about participating in baptism.
- Write down 2-3 areas in your life where you want to see God's resurrection power at work. Pray over those things.

“While we are looking at God we do not see ourselves—blessed riddance. The man who has struggled to purify himself and has had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when he stops tinkering with his soul and looks away to the Perfect One.”¹¹

A basic principle in studying the Bible is that when a verse starts with the word “therefore,” you should ask, “What is it *there for*?” “Therefore” connects what was just said with what’s going to be said. In this case (2:16), “therefore” creates a bridge that communicates, “In light of what we just found to be true, here is how the truth works itself out.”

By way of reminder, in 2:6 Paul told us that the Christian life isn’t about being the best version of you that you can be. We do not live out of our own strength and we have not won our own victories. Rather, the Christian life is about realizing that our life is now tied to—or united with—Jesus so that He wins our victories (2:15), we live out of His strength (2:7, 10), and we are re-fashioned into a whole new person based on our identity in Jesus (2:6, 11-13). When we received Him (2:6) we received new life in Him. Baptism (2:12) is a picture of going down into the grave (being submerged in water) and then being resurrected (coming up out of the water) to a new life, as a new person in Jesus. This dying and rising not only frees us from the *penalty* of our sin, but it also frees us from the enslaving *power* of our sin (2:11-15).

11 A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill: Christian Publications Inc., 1993), 85.

As we've seen throughout Colossians, the tendency to "move past" Jesus alone or to add something else to what He's done is not new. This tendency is a continual temptation for all people because we are formed by human experiences as we relate to one another by works and are shaped by a fallen nature that wants to contribute to our own righteousness. In this passage, we see that some of the Colossians were being tempted to return to "religious" rules, to rely on alleged knowledge and experiences, and even to rest on their own attempts at righteousness.

Sound familiar? This isn't the way we began or should go (2:6), but it is our natural bent. Paul confronts the broken, internal compass that points us inward and he directs our gaze towards Jesus.

We must stop looking internally or around us to others. Instead, we must look to Jesus. We have the opportunity to do this because we have been "raised with him" (3:1) and he is now our life (3:4). When we grasp that Jesus is our life, our life will change.

Chapter 3 starts with some astounding and sweet truths. These gospel-formed identity statements have the power to change us. If we soak them up, they can be squeezed out of us as we go through the day. Think about what God says about you in His Word and think about how life can be different if what He says is true. You have been "raised with Christ" (3:1). "Your life is hidden with Christ" (3:3). Jesus "is your life" (3:4). One day we "will appear with him in glory" (3:4). These statements remind us that **the gospel is not only about Jesus forgiving our past, but that it is also about Jesus giving us life in the present and a whole new future**. Since these things *are* true, to be a faithful and maturing disciple means we should not lean into or look to anything other than Jesus. Don't live out of old identities, replacement identities, or false identities. Live out of your identity in Christ, formed by looking at and knowing Christ.¹²

CHRIST IS OUR LIFE—COL. 2:16-3:4

Last week's big idea (Col. 2:6-15): *We are filled by he who is the fullness of God*

¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of

12 See Appendix 3 in the back for a list of identity statements about us in Christ.

food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ²¹ “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

3 ¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- **Passion of the flesh:** Rom. 6:12; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 4:22; 1 Pet. 1:14; 4:2; Tit. 3:3.
- **Christ, our life:** 2 Cor. 4:10-12; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21; John 11:25; 14:6.
- **Raised with Christ:** Rom. 6:1-11; 8:9-11; Col. 2:11-15; Gal. 2:20.
- Listen to the College Park sermon series entitled “The Core” at yourchurch.com/sermons. There are three sermons that cover Col. 2:16-3:4.

WAYS TO PRAY INTO THIS TEXT

- Thank God for sending Christ to keep God's law on your behalf.
- Praise God for the power of new life in Christ so that we can progressively change.
- Ask God to keep you from turning to human teaching or relying on will-power to change.
- Pray that you'd live in light of Christ being your life instead of in your old nature, being cut off.
- Pray for strength this week to fight any "indulgence" or passion of the flesh.

BIBLE-STUDY QUESTIONS (To answer individually before meeting with the group)

1. Which words were emphasized, repeated, or connected in this passage? What are 2-3 themes or key ideas that emerge?
2. What things are false teachers doing or requiring others to do in 2:8-23? (Ex.: take people captive in 2:8).
3. What do you think Paul is suggesting when he says that the empty practices and traditions (2:8) puff people up (2:19), but those who hold to Christ are nourished and knit together (2:19)? How do additional practices, traditions, or experiences puff people up but not actually lead to growth?
4. Read Col. 2:20; 2:11-15; Rom. 6:9-11; 7:4-6. How is Paul's principle in Romans—if we died with Christ then we are released from old relationships and masters—unpacked in Col. 2:16-20? What are we released from or severed from in Col. 2?
5. Paul identifies ascetic regulations of others in 2:21 and then lists reasons why the regulations are empty and powerless in 2:22-23. List 3 reasons he gives.
6. Look up John 1:4; 6:57; Rom. 6:10-11; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21. What parallels to Col. 3:3-4 (Christ is our life) exist in these texts? What does it mean that our life is hidden with Christ, or that Christ is our life?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (To discuss as a group)

1. We're nourished by and grow because of Christ (2:19-20)—the head—but this also happens as we are knit together as the body. How do we grow because of Christ? How does the body of Christ help us grow? (Compare to Eph. 4:11-16.)
2. Col. 2:23 says that adding rules, avoiding “creation,” and relying on self-discipline and asceticism might appear wise, but that those things have no power to actually stop the desires of the flesh. How does asceticism or legalism appear wise or spiritual when it's not? Why are these things ultimately powerless against the flesh?
3. In 2:23 Paul says our rules and rigorous discipline cannot stop the passions of our sinful hearts. How does Col. 3:1-4 (see 3:1-17) point us to an answer for the sinful passions of our heart?
4. What earthly things distract you from setting your heart and mind on Christ? How does this keep you from living under the authority and care of Jesus? How can you set your mind on “things above” this week?
5. Colossians 3:1-4 reminds us that our identity is now an identity **in Christ**. How have we “died,” and how is our life hidden with Christ (for more background read Col. 2:9-15)?
6. How does reminding ourselves about what is true of us in Christ—our identity—help us think rightly about how God views us or relates to us? How does our identity affect our behavior? How does it affect the way we live on a day-to-day basis?

GROUP PRACTICES (How to live the passage out together)

- Meet together in smaller groups (2-3) and share one desire of the heart that you need to fight against this week. Discuss how you can fight it in light of Col. 2:23-3:4 this week.
- Col. 2:11-3:4 reminds us that we must remember Christ's work for us (the gospel) and who we are in Christ (our identity) before we can fight sin and pursue righteousness (Col. 3:5-17). This week, encourage one another with reminders of Christ's work on our behalf and what is now true of us because we're in Him.

PERSONAL PRACTICES (Next steps & application)

- Read through Colossians and highlight phrases about your identity: “in him” or “with him.” Compare what you find to the identity statements about being in Christ in Appendix 3.
- Memorize Col. 3:1-4 and meditate on the truths of dying to the world and rising to new life with Christ.
- You’re halfway through Colossians! Take time to summarize each section you’ve studied (in 1-2 sentences) this week. Note anything you remember sticking out, and be ready to share what you’ve learned or what God has been teaching you through Colossians next week.

"Our union with Christ thus has deep plough work to do in our hearts. It automatically and immediately gives us a new status, but for that status and identity to be felt to be the deepest truth about ourselves is a radical, ongoing business. That is the primary identity of the believer, though, and the only foundation for truly Christian living. For our health, joy and fellowship, then, we must take up arms against the insidious idea that we have any identity—background, ability or status—more basic than that of sharing the Son's own life together before the Father."¹³

The theology that Paul establishes in chapters 1-2 is a theology that lives and breathes in chapters 3-4. It is not a theology of works, but it is a theology that works. Seeing Jesus should provoke worship but it should also produce maturity. Our text for this week (3:5-17) is one of Paul's famous put-off and put-on sections (see also Eph. 4 or Rom. 6) and is essential to the Christian life.

This section extends the line of thinking from 3:1-4 where Paul proclaimed our identity - who we are now that our life is hidden with Christ. As our knowledge of Jesus has expanded in Colossians, so has our understanding of ourselves, since our identity is tied to Him. Our theology of Jesus directly informs our identity in Jesus, which drives how we live. Our ethics and morality are based on our identity in Christ (3:5-17). The community we belong to is based on our identity in Christ (3:15-16). Our mission (4:2-6) is based on our identity in Christ.

13 Michael Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

Our new identity results in new freedom from old ways and new fuel to live a new way. Therefore, as we put forth effort and fight with all our might—might that the indwelling Spirit gives us—to resist sin and obey Jesus, we do so knowing that He has already done everything so that we *can* obey. He’s won the battle and re-made us, now we just seek His help and look to Him so that we can live it out. The command to “put to death” our sinful nature and old self (3:5) is possible because our old self *was* put to death with Jesus (2:11-13, 20). So, the command to “put on” (3:12) practices that fit with our new identity in Christ is possible because we were made alive with Jesus (2:13; 3:1).

What Paul is saying here (and elsewhere in the New Testament), is that the Christian life—or sanctification—is a matter of living out what is true of us. It is a life of learning to walk in our new identity. This means that Christians should take sin and holiness seriously while resting on grace, instead of returning to our own works. We do confess our sins and repent of (turn from) practices, thoughts, deeds, and sins that are part of our old self enslaved to sin, Satan, and self. But, we do so with assurance that the sins we confess are forgiven and that we can stop doing the sins we are repenting of because the Spirit is renewing us to be formed in Jesus’ image (3:10).

We don’t want sin out of our life just to get God off our back – we want sin out of our life so that we possess a clearer vision of God. Our ultimate goal as a Christian is not to “not sin” but it is to pursue, know, and reflect Jesus. Sin will keep us from that goal but we can’t lose the greater aim—seeing Jesus—in all of our skirmishes with sin. The amazing thing is that seeing Jesus is both the goal and the means by which it is accomplished. It’s only as we look to Jesus that we begin to look like Jesus. The Spirit uses us seeing Him and knowing Him to restore us into His image (3:10).

BE RENEWED IN CHRIST’S IMAGE—COL. 3:5-17

Last week’s big idea (Col. 2:16-3:4): *Grasping “Christ is our life” will change our life*

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self,

which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- **Put off:** Rom. 6:13; 8:13; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 4:22; Col. 2:11.
- **Put on:** Rom. 6:4; 8:14; Gal. 5:16, 25; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:1-4.
- Listen to the College Park sermon series entitled “The Core” at yourchurch.com/sermons. There are four sermons that cover Col. 3:5-17.

WAYS TO PRAY INTO THIS TEXT

- Thank God that your identity is fixed in Christ and that the Spirit is helping make you new.
- Confess any sin that God reveals to you.
- Ask God to help you put off the wrong things and put on the right things that He impresses on your heart this week.
- Pray that you will live out your identity instead of trying to create it through your actions.

BIBLE-STUDY QUESTIONS (To answer individually before meeting with the group)

1. What connections exist between the sins listed in 3:5? What connections exist between the sins listed in 3:8-9?
2. Which of the sins in 3:5-9 are more personal and which are more communal? Which of the righteous characteristics in 3:12-17 are personal and which are more communal?
3. Prayerfully read through 3:5-17, and ask God to convict you of sin that needs to be confessed and put to death, and to reveal any characteristics or actions that you need to put on. Write down what stands out to you.
4. Look up the following verses about putting off our old selves and putting on our new selves: Rom. 6:4, 13; 8:13-14; Gal. 5:24-25; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 2:11-13. Write down your observations and any repeated ideas.
5. What does 3:14-17 say we can do to help us put on the new man and image Christ?
6. Giving thanks is mentioned three times in verses 15-17. How does thankfulness connect to the exhortations around it?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (To discuss as a group)

1. In 3:1-4, Paul highlights our heavenly citizenship and identity in Christ. In the rest of the chapter (3:5-25) he talks about how this new identity and heavenly citizenship should direct our lives and behavior on earth. How does what we see in 3:1-4 help us think, act, and look more like Jesus?
2. What do you think Paul means by “put off the old self” (3:9) and “put on the new self” (3:10)? What are ways we can do this?
3. How do we attempt to put off/put on in our own strength or from a works-based mentality, rather than a grace-based mentality? Why is this dangerous?
4. See Romans 8:29; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4-6. How does knowledge renew us in Christ’s image? What is the focus of this knowledge and how does it lead to us looking more like Christ?

5. In 2:15-23 Paul urges us not to fight the flesh through self-reliance, asceticism, or by looking to over-the-top “spiritual” experiences. How would you summarize Paul’s strategy to fight the passions of the flesh in 3:1-17?
6. How does singing, praying, or speaking the Word to one another as a body encourage our growth?
7. What are some helpful practices or guidelines in 3:14-17 for being an encouraging community? How can we implement those things more often?

GROUP PRACTICES (How to live the passage out together)

- Identify one sin to put off or one Christ-like character quality to put on this week. Write down 2-3 ways to intentionally pursue doing so this week and share your thoughts with someone else in the group. We need to confess our sins to one another **and** we need to encourage one another in our pursuit of Jesus. Plan to encourage one another in this fight this week.
- Consider regularly meeting together in groups of 2-5 (with the same gender) to intentionally disciple one another. You can use the time to dial deeper into what’s discussed in small group, work through another discipleship-oriented resource, or read a book in the Bible together. Remember that we as the church are responsible to build one another up (Eph. 4:12-16). This often happens through relationships in a small group.

PERSONAL PRACTICES (Next steps & application)

- Col. 3:16 tells you to let the word dwell in you richly so that you speak it to others. What is one verse from Colossians that you can memorize to help create a gospel-reservoir that can easily be shared with others? Memorize that verse this week and look for ways to share it with someone.
- Take a few minutes to write down or discuss with a friend what you’ve been learning in Colossians and how it informs key areas of being a disciple of Jesus.

God – How am I growing through the Word in my knowledge of God and obedience to Him?

Gospel – How do God’s grace and promises sustain, refresh, and influence me?

Worship – Who is Jesus and why is He worth following, knowing, and enjoying?

Identity – Who am I now in Jesus and how does that change my life?

Practices – What are some of the spiritual disciplines that help me grow in my faith?

Maturity – How does God's Spirit re-make me into the image of Jesus?

Community – Who are the people that I belong to and how do we follow Christ together?

Mission – Who has God put into my life that I can point to Jesus and pour into?

WEEK EIGHT

LIVING OUT CHRIST'S LORDSHIP

COL. 3:18-4:6

"The task of the church is to get on with implementing the victory of the cross; and if we grasped that vision and lived by it, we would be able at last to address some of the problems in the Church and the world that loom so large and seem so intractable. The battle has been won; let's get on and implement it. Let us follow our victorious Lord wherever he goes."¹⁴

If you read through Colossians one thing should be clear: Jesus is the Supreme Lord over all things. This is the consistent theme throughout the whole book and is foundational to everything in it. In the hymn found in chapter 1 we saw that Jesus was Lord of creation (1:15-17), Lord of the Church (1:18-21), and Lord of the Christian (1:21-23). He rules, reigns, and governs. Notice how many times "Lord" or "Master" shows up in 3:17-4:1.

If Jesus claims every square inch of the universe, then He certainly claims every aspect of our individual lives. Part of what it means to mature in Christ is to give every part of our being and every facet of our existence to Jesus. We know that Jesus is King, but we often try to climb onto the throne with Him and rule our own world. Repentance is, in part, giving up control and asking Jesus to forgive our attempts at ruling ourselves as we ask Him to take over.

Giving up control isn't easy but it's always good. In fact, although at times it feels like allowing Jesus to be Lord requires us to sacrifice "good things" to do what's right, Jesus' lordship brings joy and fulfillment back into our lives as we learn what "the good things" really are. In other words, everything Jesus rules as Lord is gradually restored and renewed in a life-giving way.

14 N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1994), 22-23.

In 3:18-4:1 Paul explains how Jesus' lordship should affect relationships, including relationships between spouses, between parents and children, and between masters and servants. In 3:14-17 Paul talked about how Jesus' kingdom brings peace and unity in the church, and here we see that His kingdom restores order in our relationships, our families, and our workplaces. When we say yes to Christ's rule and ways for us—and no to our own rule or someone else's rule over us—we are letting Jesus lead us in righteousness. As He reigns in this way He not only helps us walk in a way that pleases Him, but He restores our lives.

Jesus, as Lord of our life, changes everything *in* our life. Our faith doesn't just affect life for a few hours on Sunday morning or the moments when you're praying or reading. Jesus' rule should extend over all of your life so that all of your life will be lived differently. His rule should affect your relationships (3:18-21). It should affect your work (3:22-4:1). It should affect the way you pray and rejoice (4:2). And it should affect how you relate to those in your life who need the gospel (4:2-6). **When we look to Jesus as Lord, He will not only teach us how to live but He will also give us life.** He will not only bring restoration to our lives, but He will give purpose and mission to our lives. Rather than begrudgingly giving your life to Him an inch at a time, why not lean into letting Jesus rule as Lord of your *whole* life. It will always work for the good of others, God's glory, and your gain.

LIVING OUT CHRIST'S LORDSHIP—COL. 3:18-4:6

Last week's big idea (Col. 3:5-17): *Be renewed in Christ's image*

¹⁸ *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*

¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.*

²⁰ *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.* ²¹ *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.* ²² *Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.* ²³ *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,* ²⁴ *knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.* ²⁵ *For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*

4 ¹ Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. ² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- **Open door:** Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:8-9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3; Rev. 3:8.
- **Prayer & evangelism:** Matt. 9:37-38; Acts 4:29; 26:18; Rom. 10:1.
- **Thanksgiving:** Ps 35:18; 100:4; 109:30; Lk. 8:39; Jn. 4:39.
- Listen to the College Park sermon series entitled “The Core” at yourchurch.com/sermons. There are three sermons that cover Col. 3:18-4:6.

WAYS TO PRAY INTO THIS TEXT

- Confess ways you’ve failed to follow Christ in the roles and relationships in your life.
- Confess any fear of man or apathy towards people that has kept you from sharing Christ.
- Thank God for the ways you’ve tasted His grace and kindness.
- Pray for specific lost people in your life.
- Pray for gospel-opportunities in your neighborhood, workplace, and family.
- Ask God to help you be a light to walk in holiness and have speech full of grace and truth.

BIBLE-STUDY QUESTIONS (To answer individually before meeting with the group)

1. Which words were emphasized, repeated, or connected in this passage? What are 2-3 themes or key ideas that emerge?
2. What are some of the roles (single, husband, wife, parent, child, roommate, friend, employee, boss, etc.) you have in life right now? What does it look like for you to live out your specific roles under the lordship of Jesus (3:17)?
3. What does it mean to work, “by way of eye-service” or as “people-pleasers”? What does it mean to work heartily for the Lord and how do we practically do that?
4. Read Col. 4:2; Eph. 6:18; Luke 18:1; 1 Thess. 5:16-18. What do you think it means to “continue steadfastly” in prayer or to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17)?
5. We often pray for things but then neglect to look for ways that God may be answering our requests, or forget to thank Him when He does answer. How can you grow in watching for God at work and then celebrating it?
6. What are the imperatives (commands or instructions) Paul gives in 4:2-6? How are these imperative commands related?
7. How many times does Paul mention “the Lord” in Col. 3:18-25? Why do you think he would emphasize Christ’s lordship so much in a section about roles and relationships?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (To discuss as a group)

1. In 3:18-4:6, Paul seems to point us to Christ’s lordship in every role and relationship. What are the primary roles, relationships, and spheres of influence you have?
2. Based on your answer to the first question, how can you be a faithful disciple of Christ in your roles and relationships? In what ways, or with whom, can you lean into making disciples based on your answer to question 1?
3. Is there a specific role or relationship that you’re struggling to follow Christ in? What is the struggle and how can the group pray about this struggle for you?

4. Read Col. 3:13; 4:1; Eph. 5:25-28; Matt. 18:23-35. How does our relationship with Christ and acknowledging how He has treated us help us to have the right heart in our roles and relationships?
5. Paul tells us to be steadfast, watchful, and thankful in our prayers. Explain each of those words and discuss practical ways to build them into your prayer life.
6. What are some ways we may unintentionally be unwise in how we relate towards those outside of the church? How can we practice walking in wisdom and with speech full of grace without ever compromising God's Word or our character?
7. How can we encourage and challenge one another to be building relationships and sharing the gospel with lost people around us?

GROUP PRACTICES (How to live the passage out together)

- Discuss how your small group might engage with lost people as a group. Consider a holiday party, cookout, inviting friends over to watch a game, spending an evening at the park, or attending a community-sponsored event together.
- Share the name of someone you want to build a relationship with and/or share the gospel with. Pray over the list of people from your group and for one another.
- Read all of Colossians again this coming week and write down what you've learned, things that have stood out to you, or things you want to take away from our study of Colossians.

PERSONAL PRACTICES (Next steps & application)

- Read a book like *Evangelism* by Mack Stiles or *Everyday Church* by Steve Timmis and Tim Chester, to help you grow in evangelism.
- Write your testimony or a short explanation of the gospel to help prepare you for sharing the wonderful news of salvation in Jesus with someone.
- Make a list of key roles and relationships in your life. Pray about areas you need to put off the old self and put on the new self. Write down how you can glorify Christ in those areas.

"It is hard for us to grasp the significance of this community identity, because we live in a radically individualistic culture. We bring this worldview with us into the church so that it shapes our understanding of the gospel. So we have a loose connection with Christians on Sunday, but then largely we go back to living our everyday lives on our own. No wonder we struggle to thrive. Our faith is animated on Sunday mornings as we sing God's praise and hear his Word. But it limps along during the week when we live apart from the body of Christ."¹⁵

At the close of this beautiful, Christ-exalting book, we're reminded that it is a personal letter written to the Colossians and the surrounding churches (4:15-16). It's a warm, pastoral letter to people that Paul loves. These people have names—though we might not know how to pronounce them—and are very similar to us. They were Christians with real struggles, temptations, and challenges who were nonetheless trying to follow Jesus. Paul has rebuked anything "not according to Christ" (2:8) throughout this sweet letter and has repeatedly magnified Jesus toward the goal of seeing the Colossians mature in Jesus (1:28).

In this final section (4:7-18), we read the names of these normal brothers and sisters who were living the Christian life *together* in Colossae. The names and the descriptions serve to remind us of a few key things. First, the church, Christ's messy but glorious bride, is the place where believers belong to one another and build one another up. The goal of gathering together and living life

15 Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 59.

together outside of formal gatherings was to promote maturity in Christ in one another. There is nothing more beautiful than *making* disciples as we share the gospel with someone and then *helping to mature* disciples as we walk with them in their journey of growing in Christ. Paul knows that the Christian life is lived in community. Church should not just be a Sunday morning destination to get what you need and then leave. Instead, it should be a tight-knit group of people caring for and encouraging one other toward maturity.

Second, there is a wonderful unity that exists within the church of Colossae and among the different churches in the region. We know that Christian love produces this type of unity (3:14). Notice how believers from one church and city are greeting believers in other cities in this passage. They love Christ and they love to hear exciting news about how the gospel is spreading and bearing fruit in other places.

Third, everyone has a role to play. Each person serves a different purpose but they work together as one, for the good of the whole body. Certainly there were many believers not mentioned in this section, but we still get a glimpse of the body taking ownership for one another's spiritual health. We need to ask ourselves, "What role would I play in a letter to our church or small group? Am I receiving from and pouring into others?" Those questions should lead us to think about how we would even want to be known when it comes to our character, our ministry, and our relationships.

As we close out Colossians we must remember that Paul struggled with all the energy that Christ was producing in him for the good of these people, because of his love for them (1:29). He points the people over and over again to the glory, grace, and goodness of Jesus. He reminds them that Jesus is supreme over all things and that Jesus alone is sufficient for everything they need. **He proclaims Jesus so that we might see Him, and in seeing Him we might become like Him.**

CHRIST'S CHURCH IN COLOSSAE—COL. 4:7-18

Last week's big idea (Col. 3:18-4:6): *Live all of life under Christ's Lordship*

7 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.

8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, 9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.” 18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- **Tychichus:** Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:21-22; Acts 20:4; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12; **Epaphras:** Col. 1:7-8; 4:12-13; **Aristarchus:** Col. 4:10; Acts 19:29; 27:2ff; **Luke:** Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Luke & Acts; **Mark:** Col. 4:10; Acts 13:13; 15:39; 2 Tim. 4:11; **Onesimus:** 4:9; Philem.; **Demas:** Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:9-10; **Archippus:** Col. 4:17; Philemon 2.
- Listen to the College Park sermon series entitled “The Core” at yourchurch.com/sermons. There are two sermons that cover Col. 4:7-18.

WAYS TO PRAY INTO THIS TEXT

- Thank God for the believers He’s put in your life to encourage your growth.
- Ask God to keep maturing you into the image of Christ.
- Pray for opportunities to share who Jesus is with unbelievers in your life.
- Pray for wisdom about who you might pour into and disciple into maturity.

BIBLE-STUDY QUESTIONS (To answer individually before meeting with the group)

1. In 4:7-17, how does Paul describe the character and service of the believers he mentions?
2. Demas is mentioned (Col. 4:14) as being with Paul as he wrote Colossians, a letter that emphasizes staying with Christ. However, we later see in 2 Tim. 4:10 that Demas has turned from Christ because of a love for this world. How might Demas' example warn us and humble us?
3. What words, ideas, doctrines, or themes emerged in Colossians?
4. How would you explain Christ's sufficiency and supremacy based on what you've learned from Colossians? How does His sufficiency and supremacy affect our sanctification?
5. Read some of Paul's other letter closings and note their similarities and differences: Rom. 1:17-27; 1 Cor. 16:12-24; 2 Cor. 13:11-14; Eph. 6:21-24; Phil. 4:21-23.
6. The closing sentence (4:18) has at least three personal elements in it. How do each of those elements convey a personal care and bond to the Colossians?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (To discuss as a group)

1. Epaphras labored so the people at Colossae would be "mature" (Col. 4:12). Based on our reading of Colossians, how would you describe "maturity" in Christ?
2. This text (4:7-18) reminds us that the church is a group of imperfect people faithfully serving the Lord and His church. How does this text help us understand the body of Christ? How can we apply this passage of Scripture?
3. In Colossians, when a name is mentioned (for example, Epaphras) we see a specific role that they play in the church. How do you fit into the ministry of the church? Are there people that God has placed in your life to share the gospel with or help disciple?
4. If your church or small group wrote a letter, what would you want it to say about you in the personal closing (similar to Col. 4:7-17)? In ten or twenty years, what do you want your involvement, relationships, and ministry in the local church to have looked like?
5. How would you summarize the theme of Colossians in 1-2 sentences?

6. What are impactful verses from Colossians that will stick with you? Why did these verses stand out?
7. What has God taught you during this series? What truths or practices do you want to keep with you as we leave this study of Colossians?

GROUP PRACTICES (How to live the passage out together)

- If your group knows each other well enough, give everyone a stack of post-it notes or note cards. Write the name of a group member on the card and then write down something you appreciate about them, a way that you see Christ in them, or a word that would describe them. Do this for each group member and then distribute cards to each other as a way to affirm and encourage one another.
- Have each group member write a thank you card to one of your pastors or an elder, thanking them for how they serve and shepherd the church.

PERSONAL PRACTICES (Next steps & application)

- The people described in 4:7-18 are *real* people in the Colossian church. Each of them are described by their character, contribution, or how they served as opposed to being described by their gifts. If a letter was written from your church, what would you want it to say about you? Write down a goal for what you want your life and involvement in serving other Christians to be.
- Evangelism and discipleship are two key ways to love others so that they come to know Jesus or are able to grow in Jesus. While these things may feel intimidating, the Word tells us that God wants us to have relationships where our faith is stretched as we proclaim Jesus (1:28). Ask God to bring unbelievers who you can share the supremacy of Jesus with into your life. Or, ask Him to bring believers into your life who you can disciple by pointing them to Jesus in the Word.
- If you are a member of a church, connected in community, and serving others well, keep doing so! If this doesn't describe you, spend some time praying and thinking about what steps you can take to better connect with the body of Christ.

APPENDIX 1

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES ON COLOSSIANS

Books and Commentaries

- Garland, David E., *Colossians, Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).
- Hedges, Brian, *Christ All Sufficient* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).
- Hughes, R. Kent, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Wapwallopen: Shepherd Press, 2016).
- Melick Jr., Richard R., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991).
- Moo, Douglas J., *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).
- O'Brien, Peter, *Colossians, Philemon* (Waco: Word Books, 1982).
- Pao, David, *Thanksgiving* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002).
- Storms, Sam, *The Hope of Glory: 100 Meditations on Colossians* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).

Sermon Series

- College Park Church (Mark Vroegop)
yourchurch.com/series/colossians-the-core/
- The Village Church (Matt Chandler) thevillagechurch.net/resources/sermons/series/colossians-2010/
- Desiring God (John Piper)
desiringgod.org/sermons/by-scripture/colossians/1
- Truth for Life (Alistair Begg)
truthforlife.org/resources/scripture/colossians/

APPENDIX 2

GLORIOUS STATEMENTS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS

Person

- He is the image of the invisible God (1:15)
- He is the firstborn of all creation and the firstborn from the dead (1:15, 18)
- He is the creator of all things (1:16)
- He is the one whom all things point to and glorify (1:16)
- He is before all things—pre-existent and first in rank (1:17, 18)
- He is the one holding all things together (1:17)
- He is the head of the body, his church (1:18)
- He is the fullness of God (1:19; 2:9)
- He is the fullness of God who became a man (2:9)
- He is the redeemer and reconciler of all things (1:20)
- He is God's glorious mystery revealed (1:27; 2:2)
- He is the treasure-house of all wisdom and knowledge (2:3)
- He is the head of all rule and authority (2:10)
- He is seated at the right hand of God—as the Davidic King (3:1)

Work

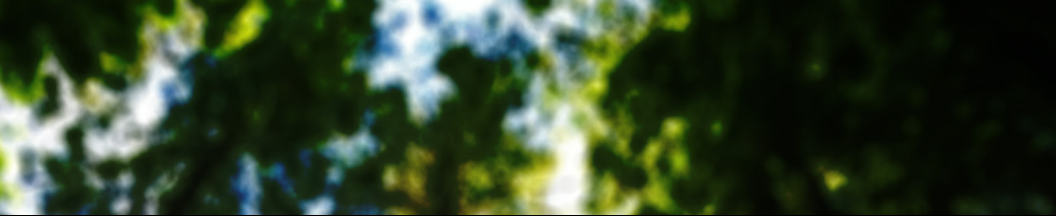
- He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into his kingdom (1:13)
- He has redeemed us and forgiven us our sins (1:14)
- He has reconciled creation to Himself (1:19)
- He has reconciled believers back to God (1:22)
- He has made us holy, blameless, and above reproach (1:22)
- He has circumcise our hearts through his death and resurrection (2:11-14)
- He has cancelled the record of debt against us at the cross (2:14)
- He has disarmed the spiritual rulers and triumphed over them (2:15)
- He has been raised from the dead by the power of God (3:12, 13)
- He nourishes and grows his body, the Church (2:19)
- He gives a new identity to us by being all (everything) and in all (3:11)

APPENDIX 3

GLORIOUS STATEMENTS ABOUT US IN CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS

- We are saints (1:2, 4)
- We are forgiven and redeemed (1:14; 2:14; 3:13)
- We are holy, blameless, and above reproach before God (1:21)
- Christ is in us (1:27)
- We are united to one another (1:2; 2:2; 2:19)
- God is our Father (1:2; 3:17)
- The Spirit is in us (1:8)
- There is a hope laid up in heaven for us (1:5)
- We are bearing fruit and growing (1:6)
- We have heard and understood the grace of God and the truth of God (1:5-6)
- We get the knowledge of His will (1:9; 2:2)
- We get wisdom, knowledge, and understanding (1:9, 10; 2:2)
- We walk in a way that pleases Him (1:10)
- We image or reflect God (1:10)
- We receive God's strength and empowerment (1:11)
- We have an inheritance (1:23)
- We're delivered from the domain of darkness into Christ's kingdom (1:13)
- We're forgiven of sins and redeemed to Christ (1:14; 2:13, 14)
- We're reconciled back to God and made at peace with Him (1:20, 22)
- We have the hope of glory because Christ is in us (1:27)
- We are maturing in Him (1:28; 4:12)
- We are filled in Him (2:10)
- We are circumcised in our hearts (2:11)
- We are dead to the old man/flesh and the things of the world in Christ (2:11, 12, 13, 19; 3:3, 9)
- We are raised with Him as a new man (2:12; 3:1)
- We have victory over spiritual rulers and authorities (2:15)
- We are nourished and grown by Christ our Head (2:19)
- We are seated with Christ at the right hand of God (3:1)

- Our life is hidden with Christ in God (3:3)
- Christ is our life (3:4)
- We will appear with Christ when He appears in glory (3:4)
- We have put off the old self with its practices and put on the new self with its practices (3:9, 10, 12)
- We are being renewed in knowledge after the image of our Creator (3:10; 17)
- We are in Christ, and Christ is all and in all (3:11)
- We have the peace of Christ ruling our hearts and the word of Christ dwelling in our hearts (3:15, 16)



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