

# COLOSSIANS

Colossians: Walking Worthy with Christ  
by Christa Lord

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# ***INTRODUCTION***

Paul yearns for the Colossian believers to continue fervently following the Lord, just as they had received Him. In this letter, Paul assures, encourages, and affirms their transformation from darkness to light, old to new.

Paul emphasizes this transformation repeatedly throughout the letter. He uses different pictures to contrast our old and new natures, like darkness with light, or death with resurrection. Now that we've joined God's family, our old sin nature has absolutely nothing in common with our new nature. These two natures have different goals, focuses, loves, and behaviors.

Only Christ can take us out of sin's terrible state and put us into a different one. But Christ doesn't pluck us out of sin's grasp just to abandon us. He carries us farther and gives us more. He continues to guide and motivate us to act like Him in all that we do.

As Christ transforms us into His image, we should live out that spiritual transformation in our daily lives. This truth is the theme of Colossians.

Like Paul, we desire for believers to pursue Christ and live like Him. This study aims to teach truth and to show believers how to practice that truth in their personal walk with Christ. Our highest hope is for you to walk worthy of Jesus, bear the fruit of good works, and increase in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:10).

## ***IN THIS STUDY***

This study contains two components: a Teacher's Manual and a Student Manual. The Teacher's Manual contains lecture material, and the Student Manual contains a fill-in-the-blank outline for students to follow along with the teacher's lesson, along with three readings to be completed after the lecture.

The Teacher's Manual includes . . .

### **► *LECTURES AND DISCUSSION***

The teacher's lecture works through the text from Colossians, offering notes as well as group discussion prompts.

### **► *STUDENT MANUAL FACSIMILES***

These are the pages of the Student Manual with answers filled in.

The Student Manual includes . . .

► ***THE TEACHER'S LESSON OUTLINE***

This contains blanks for the student to fill in while listening to the Teacher's Lesson. The blanks in the outline correspond with the underlined words in the headings of the Teacher's Lesson. Students may write their own notes here as well.

► ***THREE READING SESSIONS***

These are to be completed individually by students after the Teacher's Lesson. You can encourage students to include these passages in their devotional readings sometime during the week.

► ***QUESTIONS***

Each reading session will feature a passage of Scripture for students to read, as well as some content-focused questions to answer.

*CHECK YOUR BEARINGS*

At the end of these sessions, students are prompted to think about how they might apply a point from the Scripture text in their lives.

*TRAIL MAP*

At the end of the week, students can read the next lesson's Scripture text from Colossians. A question encourages students to think about the text, but they do not need to write down an answer.

► ***SCRIPTURE MEMORY***

An optional Scripture memory list is included.

**Note:** You can also download a free presentation of the Teacher's Lessons at [positiveaction.org](http://positiveaction.org).

# ***SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING***

Typically, one lesson can be covered in one week. However, feel free to adjust the study to your own schedule.

A suggested order for each lesson is as follows:

<b>Teacher's Lecture</b>	<b>SM Reading 1</b>	<b>SM Reading 2</b>	<b>SM Reading 3</b>
Students follow along in their Student Manuals, filling in blanks in the Teacher's Outline.	Students individually study a related passage.	Students individually study a related passage.	Students individually study a related passage.

To prepare for the lesson, prayerfully read through the Scripture text for that lesson, and then read the lesson text itself.

Before teaching the first lesson, distribute Student Manuals to each participant. During the Teacher's Lesson, begin by reading aloud the Scripture text for that lesson. Specific verses are noted in headings, and you may wish to reread those verses as you get to them in the lecture. Teach through the lesson as students fill in the blanks in their lesson outline.

A Scripture memory list is available. Consider having students memorize the passage to recite or write out at the next class gathering. Challenge students by offering a prize for those who complete the memory program.

## ***STUDY OBJECTIVES***

- Trace Paul's line of thought in the letter of Colossians.
- Note how the historical context of Colossians impacts its form and cultural application.
- Illustrate what believers' new lives look like in Christ, as described in Colossians 3:5-11.
- Explain the importance of cultivating thankfulness to God in our lives.
- Anticipate how to live out our new nature in specific scenarios.

# ***OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS***

Introduction and greeting (1:1–12)

Favorable report of the Colossian church

Prayer for the church's continued growth

Praise of Christ (1:13–23)

Christ's superiority

Christ's work of reconciliation

Paul's explanation of his ministry (1:23–2:5)

Everything for the sake of the gospel

The mystery of the gospel revealed

Warning against alternative teaching (2:4–23)

Review of Christ's person and work

Asceticism necessarily excludes Christ

Asceticism doesn't prevent sin

Contrast of two selves—the old and the new (3:1–17)

Characteristics of the old

Characteristics of the new

Living out the new self (3:18–4:6)

Families

Slaves and masters

The church

Closing (4:7–18)

Request for Prayer

Showing Christ to unbelievers in word and action

# SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Teacher's Lesson Objectives	Student Manual Topics
<b>Lesson 1: Introduction to Colossians (1:1-8)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians within a historical and cultural context.</li> <li>▪ Paul praised the Colossian church for its faithfulness to Christ.</li> <li>▪ The gospel continues to work and produce fruit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2 Peter 1:1-11—Characteristics that God creates in us</li> <li>▪ Luke 8:4-15—The parable of the soils</li> <li>▪ Ephesians 1:3-8—Activities of Christ in the believer</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 2: Walking Worthy (1:9-12)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Believers should continue to learn about God to grow in wisdom.</li> <li>▪ To walk worthy of God means to live in a way that reflects our status as children of God.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Colossians 1:9-12; Ephesians 1:15-19—Dynamic growth in the believer</li> <li>▪ 1 Corinthians 1:18-31—God's wisdom in contrast to the world's</li> <li>▪ 1 Corinthians 2:6-16—The Holy Spirit helping us understand God's wisdom</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 3: The Hymn of Christ, Part 1 (1:13-17)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Paul describes Christ and His many roles.</li> <li>▪ Christ redeemed us by rescuing us from sin and forgiving us.</li> <li>▪ Christ is a perfect reflection of God the Father.</li> <li>▪ Christ holds a position of prominence and privilege as God's Son.</li> <li>▪ Everything was created by Jesus Christ.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Luke 5:17-26—Jesus' power over sin</li> <li>▪ Acts 2:22-36—Jesus' power over death</li> <li>▪ Revelation 5:1-14—Jesus' worthiness as Redeemer</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 4: The Hymn of Christ, Part 2 (1:18-23)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Paul uses the metaphor of a head and body to illustrate Christ's relationship to the church.</li> <li>▪ As the head guides and cares for the body, so Christ does for the church.</li> <li>▪ Christ is the firstborn from the dead because He rose again.</li> <li>▪ Christ reconciled us to God by dying for our sins.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ephesians 2:11-19—The unity of all believers in Christ</li> <li>▪ Romans 5:1-11—The hope that Christ gives us</li> <li>▪ Romans 12:1-21—Living for Christ and serving within the church</li> </ul>

Teacher’s Lesson Objectives	Student Manual Topics
<b>Lesson 5: Discipleship Within the Church (1:24–2:5)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Paul rejoiced in sharing the gospel, and he was willing to suffer for it.</li> <li>▪ In Scripture, <i>mystery</i> means something not fully revealed or understood.</li> <li>▪ In addition to preaching, Paul warned, taught, commended, and encouraged.</li> <li>▪ We should use what God has given us to help other believers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ephesians 4:11–16—God using believers to help each other grow</li> <li>▪ 1 Timothy 4:6–16—Training ourselves for spiritual benefit</li> <li>▪ 2 Timothy 2:14–26—Teaching the Word and leading through example</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 6: Established in Christ (2:6–15)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We must live by faith.</li> <li>▪ True faith in Christ will result in words and actions that please Him.</li> <li>▪ Jesus Christ is sufficient for our spiritual growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ John 15:1–11—Abiding in Jesus to bear spiritual fruit</li> <li>▪ Philippians 1:3–11—God working in us to perfect us</li> <li>▪ Galatians 5:1–15—Using our freedom in Christ to serve others</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 7: Freedom in Christ (2:16–23)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Christians are accountable to God for their spiritual practices.</li> <li>▪ In Christ, we are freed from trying to make ourselves holy by keeping rules.</li> <li>▪ Rules can’t prevent us from sinning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Romans 14:1–23—Loving others despite disagreement about rules</li> <li>▪ 1 Corinthians 8:1–13—Encouraging believers not to sin against their own conscience</li> <li>▪ 1 Corinthians 9:15–27—Foregoing our rights in order to show love</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 8: Characteristics of the Old Life, Part 1 (3:1–7)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When we follow Christ, our behavior and attitudes will change.</li> <li>▪ Characteristics of our old sinful life include greed, idolatry, sexual sin, and the desire to do wrong.</li> <li>▪ God will judge every person who practices these sinful behaviors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1 Corinthians 6:1–20—Honoring God with our bodies and actions</li> <li>▪ James 1:19–25—God’s Word changing our actions</li> <li>▪ Matthew 5:27–38—Doing good instead of evil to those who wrong us</li> </ul>

Teacher's Lesson Objectives	Student Manual Topics
<b>Lesson 9: Characteristics of the Old Life, Part 2 (3:8-11)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As Christ helps us grow spiritually, our words will be gracious instead of selfish.</li> <li>▪ Old, sinful speech is characterized by anger, slander, evil, and lying.</li> <li>▪ Although the church is diverse, it is unified in Christ.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Matthew 15:1-20—Sin's origin in our hearts</li> <li>▪ James 3:1-12—The power and impact of our words</li> <li>▪ Ephesians 4:17-32—Building up people with our words</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 10: Characteristics of the New Life (3:12-14)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Because God has chosen us, we are different from the world, we have His favor, and we become like Christ.</li> <li>▪ Our new life in Christ is characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and love.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Galatians 5:16-26—Walking in the Spirit</li> <li>▪ 1 John 4:7-26—The God of love</li> <li>▪ Luke 6:27-36—Doing good to our enemies</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 11: Peace and Gratitude (3:15-17)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Christ is the source of our peace.</li> <li>▪ Through Christ, we have peace with God and a basis for trust in difficult situations.</li> <li>▪ Gratitude is a necessary part of prayer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1 Timothy 6:3-11—Learning contentment</li> <li>▪ Philippians 4:4-14—Prayer and peace</li> <li>▪ James 3:13-4:10—Jealousy and selfishness as disruptions to unity and peace</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 12: Transforming Our Relationships (3:18-4:1)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We can obey Christ in any situation.</li> <li>▪ Our relationships should be characterized by love, submission, and consideration.</li> <li>▪ All people are equal before God.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Romans 12:9-21—Relating to one another in love</li> <li>▪ Ephesians 5:15-33—Loving and submitting to one another</li> <li>▪ John 13:1-20—Christ as an example of humility and love</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 13: Paul's Final Instructions (4:2-18)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Believers should pray regularly and consistently.</li> <li>▪ Like Paul, believers should share the gospel through word and action.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reflection</li> </ul>

# ***SCRIPTURE MEMORY***

Lesson	Scripture
1	1 Timothy 4:8
2	Ephesians 5:8–9
3	Titus 3:5–6
4	Ephesians 4:15–16
5	Romans 12:4–5
6	Colossians 2:6–7
7	Romans 14:17–19
8	Colossians 3:1–2
9	Colossians 3:9–10
10	Psalms 103:8–10
11	Colossians 3:16–17
12	Galatians 5:13–14
13	Colossians 4:5–6

## ***FEEDBACK***

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# Lesson One

## Introduction to Colossians

### Primary Text

Colossians 1:1–8

### Content Objectives

- Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians within a historical and cultural context.
- Paul praised the Colossian church for its faithfulness to Christ.
- The gospel continues to work and produce fruit.

### Lesson

Paul wrote the Book of Colossians as an epistle, or letter, to the church at Colossae. This letter is relatively short, divided into just four chapters. Despite its small size, it reveals profound truth about Christ and the church.

## ***THE BACKGROUND OF COLOSSIANS***

Before we jump into the message of Colossians, let's look at the letter's background to get a better sense of why and how it was written.

### ***PAUL AUTHORED THIS EPISTLE.***

Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians from prison—or at least, while under house arrest. We don't have enough evidence to say for certain where and when Paul wrote Colossians, but he probably wrote this letter around AD 60 while imprisoned in Rome. Unfortunately, we don't have the full timeline of Paul's ministry, so it's impossible to date this letter for certain.

## *PAUL DICTATED THIS LETTER.*

As with many of his other letters, Paul dictated his words to an assistant who wrote them down. This was common practice. The first verse mentions Timothy, so he may have acted as Paul's scribe for this letter. At the end of the letter, Paul did sign off personally with his own hand (4:18).

**Background:** Timothy, we learn elsewhere, was a disciple from Lystra who accompanied Paul during his ministry (see Acts 16:1). As a child, Timothy learned about God from his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (see 2 Tim. 1:5).

Later, Timothy traveled with Paul on his journeys and shared the gospel alongside him. Paul depended on Timothy and invested in him—to the point where he called Timothy his son (see 1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:22). Paul also sent Timothy in his place to encourage some of the churches (see 1 Cor. 16:10; 1 Thess. 3:2, 6). Timothy was a great help and blessing to Paul and his ministry.

## *PAUL HAD NEVER VISITED THIS CHURCH.*

In Colossians 2:1, Paul implies that he had never visited the church at Colossae in person. Paul planted many churches, but this church may have begun with a believer named Epaphras (cf. Col. 1:7–8; 4:13). Even if Paul never met these believers, he still desired to encourage and teach them.

At the beginning of the letter, Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, meaning that Christ appeared to him after His resurrection and personally disciplined him (cf. Acts 9:1–19). Like the other apostles—that is, the original twelve disciples, minus Judas—Paul was personally commissioned by Christ to teach and make disciples (cf. Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 9:15–16). Paul had the authority to teach in the name of Jesus. This apostleship also determined his mission—to share the good news of Jesus.

## *PAUL WROTE OUT OF GENERAL CONCERN FOR THIS CHURCH.*

Paul wrote some of his letters, such as 1 and 2 Corinthians, to correct problems in churches. But for the Colossians, Paul has no complaints about them or their behavior. Paul commends these Christians, calling them “faithful” (Col. 1:2) and praising their faith and love for others (1:4). Paul writes only to remind and encourage them in their belief.

## *PAUL WROTE A SIMILAR LETTER TO THE EPHESIAN CHURCH.*

Paul's letter to the Colossians is similar to his letter to the Ephesians. The letters share many of the same topics, and they follow a similar structure.

<b>Colossians</b>	<b>Ephesians</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1:1–12	1:1–19	A prayer for the believer's growth in the letter's introduction
1:16	1:20–21	Christ's authority over everything
1:18	1:22–23	Christ as the head of the church
3:1–3, 9–10	4:17–24	The old self and the new
3:5–11	4:25–32	Putting off and putting on
3:18–4:1	5:15–6:9	Service within relationships
4:2–4	6:18–20	Request for prayer; a desire to spread the gospel

Paul probably wrote Colossians and Ephesians around the same time. Many scholars think that Paul wrote Colossians and then expanded on the same topics for Ephesians.

It may seem redundant to have two similar epistles in the New Testament, but it's actually helpful. Each book can help us understand the other better. This study will often cross-reference Ephesians to shed additional light on what Paul means in Colossians. As we compare the two letters, we can see the consistency of Paul's message over time. Paul wrote about the same principles to different audiences at different times.

## *PAUL WROTE TO THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE (1:1–2).*

What can we tell about the Colossian believers from this letter?

### *COLOSSAE WAS A SMALL, DIVERSE CITY.*

Colossae was located in a Roman province of Asia Minor, in what is today southern Turkey. Before Paul's time, it was a bustling city famous for its dark red wool, and it straddled two major trade roads.

But by the first century AD, one of those roads had been moved. As traffic declined, so did the city, and by Paul's time it was relatively small and unremarkable.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 26.

However, its population included a variety of ethnicities and religions. While there were probably some Jews, most of the people were Gentiles. When Paul describes false teaching at Colossae, he seems to reference a mixture of ideas and beliefs, including Judaism (see Col. 2:8–23). This inclusion implies some Jewish presence in the city.

### *THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH WAS PRIMARILY GENTILE.*

Like their host city, the believers at Colossae were mostly Gentiles—that is, non-Jews. Paul writes with this audience in mind. Paul specifically mentions that God has revealed the mystery of the gospel, Christ, to the Gentiles (1:27). When he writes about circumcision—a practice common to Jews, not Gentiles—Paul uses it as a metaphor for spiritual transformation (2:11–13). And Paul emphasizes the unity of the church, that Christ is working equally in all people, Jew and Gentile alike (3:11).

At this time, churches weren't structured the same as modern churches. Today, when we talk about a church, we usually mean an assembly of Christians that meet in a single location. But in Paul's time, there were relatively few Christians with no dedicated buildings in which Christians could meet and worship. Jews had synagogues and the temple, but Christians gathered wherever they could, usually in someone's home. The "church" referred to the believers themselves, not to an institution or a building.

## ***THEMES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LETTER***

Colossians is a relatively short letter, but it explores several profound aspects of the Christian experience.

### *CHRIST IS THE FOUNDATION FOR OUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH.*

A prominent topic is Christ—specifically, His superiority and His work in His followers. Paul introduces this theme with a hymn of praise in the first chapter (vv. 15–20). Paul describes Christ's roles and activities as the Son of God.

- He is the exact representation of God.
- He has ultimate authority over all earthly powers and the church.
- He has the power to create and sustain our world.
- He is the one who rescued us from the domain of sin.

## ***CHRIST COMPLETELY CHANGES OUR ACTIONS AND DESIRES.***

Christ saved us from the curse of sin and set us on a new path of righteousness. Paul describes this change with several contrasts:

- The old self and the new self
- Being dead to sin and being alive to God
- The earthly and the heavenly

In chapter 3, Paul describes how our old nature results in selfish, harmful behavior. These things should not characterize us any longer. Instead, Christians should be characterized by God's own love—the love that rules us and unites us.

## ***CHRISTIANS SHOULD CONTINUE TO GROW SPIRITUALLY.***

Paul writes this letter to encourage believers to keep growing spiritually. He summarizes this theme in chapter 2.

**Read Colossians 2:6-7.** We received Christ through faith by God's grace; therefore, we live in Him. We have started well in the truth, and we must stay in that truth during our spiritual journey.

To grow spiritually, we must first know what is true about Christ—what Christ did and what Christ said—and remember that truth always. Therefore, we depend on Scripture, the record of Jesus' words and deeds, as our food for growth. After we know the truth, we must then decide to live out that truth—to do what is right and to live out the righteousness that Christ has given us. Knowing and doing go hand in hand.

## ***PAUL'S GREETING (1:3-8)***

Now that we've gotten an overview of the letter and its background, let's look at the text itself. In his introduction, Paul explains his purpose for writing this letter. He thanks God because this church has responded to the gospel (1:3-8), and he prays for their continued faith and knowledge (1:9-12).

## ***THIS CHURCH IS KNOWN FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LOVE (1:3-4).***

Paul begins his letter with gratitude. He praises God for the church in Colossae. Although he hasn't visited them in person, he's heard about them—how they received the gospel and responded in faith.

Paul credits God for this church's good work and reputation. As a result of the gospel, the Colossians have strengthened their faith in Jesus and their love for "the saints," or other Christians. These two things—faith and love—go together in a believer's life.

As Jesus prepared His disciples for His crucifixion, Jesus said that His followers would be identified by an important quality. **Read John 13:34–35.** Jesus told His disciples that they would be identified by their love for both God and others.

**Discuss:** What is God's definition of love? Is it a feeling? Why does God command us to love others?

True love is seeking the highest good for another person, often at a cost. Even if we don't feel very loving, we can choose to reflect the kind of love that God has shown us.

## *PAUL REJOICED OVER THE GOSPEL AT COLOSSAE (1:5–8).*

### *THE GOSPEL PROVIDES A FUTURE HOPE (1:5).*

Paul continues to give thanks, not only for the Colossians' faith and love, but also for their future blessings. Paul refers to these future blessings as "hope."

**Background:** Sometimes we use the word *hope* to mean that we really, really want something to happen, but we're not sure if it will. However, Scripture uses *hope* to mean something that we don't have right now, but that we expect to have at a definite, future time.

So, the hope of heaven is a sure thing. We believers expect it someday. We don't know when, but we believe God when He says that He's preparing it for us.

### *THE GOSPEL KEEPS PRODUCING FRUIT (1:6).*

Even though the gospel was relatively new, it was spreading through the known world. In Acts, we can read about the apostles and their efforts to spread the gospel of Christ. After Peter's sermon at Pentecost, about 3,000 people believed (Acts 2:41). More and more people heard and received the gospel. No amount of persecution could stop the truth of Christ.

What is this message? What does Paul mean by *the gospel*? We find a condensed version of this in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.** Jesus, who was completely perfect and obedient to God, died for our sins. But He didn't remain dead. After three days, He came back to life again, just as He said He would (see Matt. 16:21). By doing all this, Jesus gave us a way back to God. If we confess our sins, God will forgive them for the sake of Christ, who took our place and paid our penalty.

To Paul, the gospel was not simply a theory to study or debate. Wherever it took hold, it changed lives. Christians rejected idol worship, loved each other, and cared for the poor and sick. The gospel of Jesus made a distinct difference in the lives of believers.

**Discuss:** In what ways has the gospel made a difference in your life, or in the life of someone you know? It might be hard to identify major differences if you've been a Christian for most of your life. In that case, how has the gospel shaped your outlook on life?

God did not save people and then abandon them; He continued to work in them. Paul writes that the gospel continued to produce fruit in the Colossians even after they had received Christ.

### ***EPAPHRAS WAS A MESSENGER OF THE GOSPEL (1:7-8).***

Paul had received an update on this church from a man named Epaphras. Paul calls him a fellow servant, someone who was totally committed to obeying Christ. Epaphras and Paul worked together to teach the gospel. Epaphras is mentioned only one other time in the New Testament, where Paul calls him a "fellow prisoner" in Christ (Philem. 23).

Epaphras was close to the Colossian church, and he seems to have cared deeply about these Christians. Paul describes Epaphras as one of the Colossians (Col. 4:12). We're not sure if this means he was originally from Colossae or if he formed a deep bond with these believers.

Although Epaphras was away from the church at the time of Paul's writing, he made sure to send his greetings. He wanted the Colossian believers to know God better, and he continually prayed for them.

# ***CONCLUSION***

Paul thanked God for how He had changed the Colossian believers. They hadn't just accepted the gospel. These Christians had changed from the inside out—and it showed. They were learning more about God, and they were acting more like Him.

God wants us to grow more like Him—to share the same thoughts and the same love. He freely offers help to us by His grace.

- He helps through the Holy Spirit, who guides each believer.
- We also have His Word, where we can learn about His truth.
- We have brothers and sisters in Christ who pray for us and encourage us.

God wants us to grow, and He gives us everything we need to do so.

## LESSON OUTLINE • COLOSSIANS 1:1-8

### The Background of Colossians

- ▶ Paul authored this epistle.
  - ◉ Paul dictated this letter.
  - ◉ Paul had never visited this church.
  - ◉ Paul wrote out of general concern for this church.
  - ◉ Paul wrote a similar letter to the Ephesian church.
- ▶ Paul wrote to the church at Colossae (1:1-2).
  - ◉ Colossae was a small, diverse city.
  - ◉ The Colossian church was primarily Gentile.

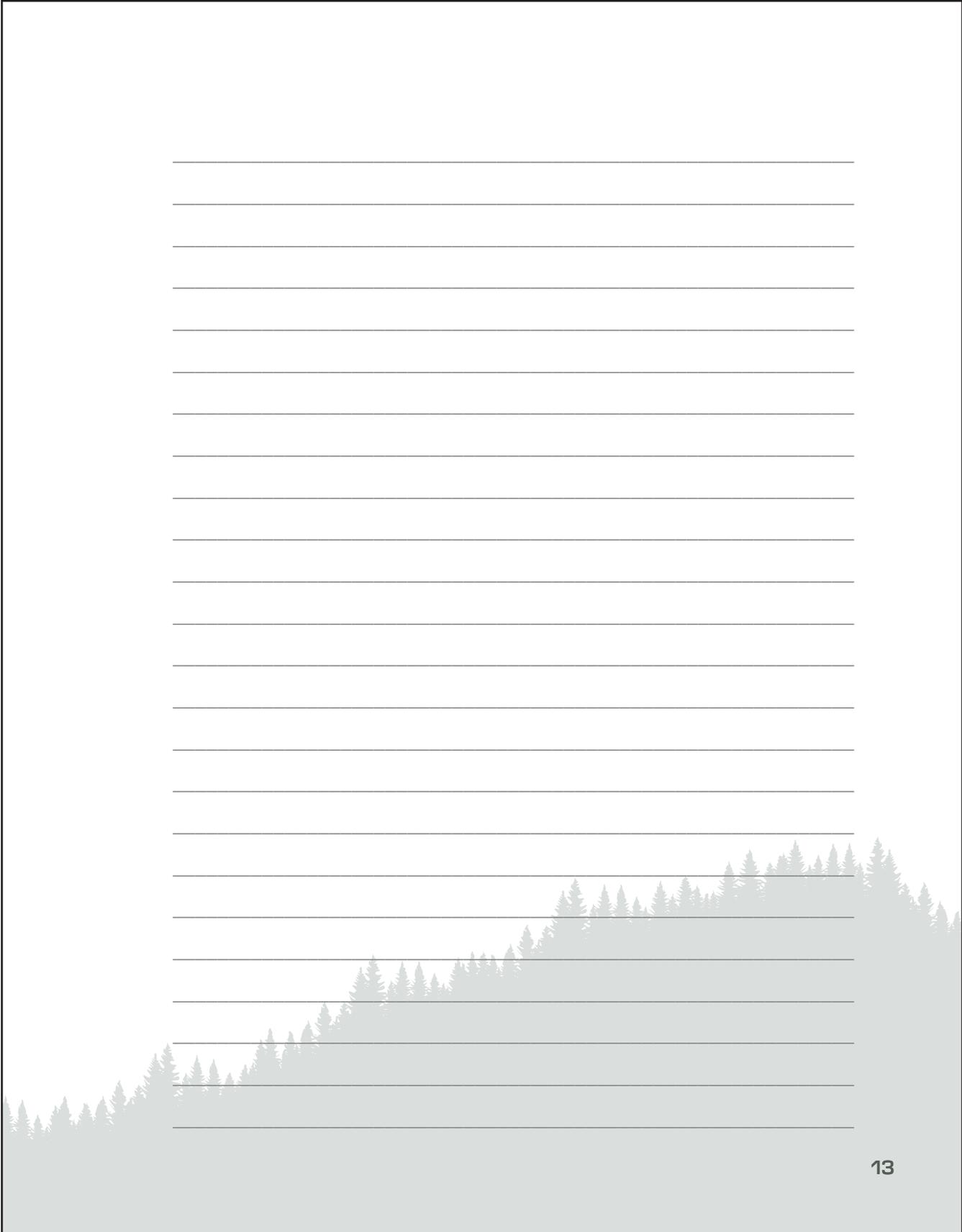
### Themes and Characteristics of the Letter

- ▶ Christ is the foundation for our spiritual growth.
- ▶ Christ completely changes our actions and desires.
- ▶ Christians should continue to grow spiritually.

### Paul's Greeting (1:3-8)

- ▶ This church was known for Christian faith and love (1:3-4).
- ▶ Paul rejoiced over the gospel at Colossae (1:5-8).
  - ◉ The gospel provides a future hope (1:5).
  - ◉ The gospel keeps producing fruit (1:6).
- ▶ Epaphras was a messenger of the gospel (1:7-8).





A large rectangular frame containing 20 horizontal lines for writing. At the bottom, there is a decorative silhouette of a forest of evergreen trees on a hillside.

# DAY 1

- ▶ Read **Colossians 1:3-6** again. What is the gospel doing in the Colossian church (v. 6)?

## Producing fruit and growing

We might think that the gospel exists only to spark a belief in Christ. But the work doesn't stop there. Even after we begin to follow Christ, God continues to use the gospel to change us.

What is the gospel—this “good news”? Jesus Himself preached this good news, presenting it as the “kingdom of God.” This kingdom is filled with people who turn away from sin and toward God’s righteousness. This kingdom offers life, wholeness, and joy. Its citizens live honestly, humbly, and lovingly.

The path into this kingdom is through Jesus Christ. Only through Him will we escape sin. On our own, we are weak and powerless to stop sinning. But if we surrender to God, He will help us turn away from sin and its outcome—death.

The gospel continues to be relevant throughout our lives. As followers of Jesus, we live in the new kingdom of God, transforming bit by bit through Christ.

- ▶ Read **2 Peter 1:1-11** and fill in the blanks to complete the summaries.
  - ◉ **Verse 3**—Through His power, God has given us everything we need/pertaining to life and godliness.
  - ◉ **Verse 4**—God’s ultimate goal for us, made known through these promises, is that we may partake, or participate, in the divine nature.
  - ◉ **Verses 5-7**—We should add, or supplement, these characteristics to our faith:
    - Virtue/moral excellence/goodness
    - Knowledge

- Self-control/temperance
- Steadfastness/perseverance/patience
- Godliness
- Brotherly affection/brotherly kindness/mutual affection
- Love/charity



### **CHECK YOUR BEARINGS**

When it comes to Christian living, we can easily fall into one of two extremes.

- **Some of us live like our spiritual maturity depends entirely on us.** We forget that Christ works within us. If we try to mature spiritually on our own, our mistakes will devastate us. Our perfectionism will burn us out.
- **And then some of us put in little effort at all, perhaps in an attempt to avoid legalism.** We tell ourselves that God will work things out anyway. If we hold this view, we will grow slowly—if at all. God does work in us through many influences in our life, but His work accelerates in pace with our faith and obedience.

Both extremes miss the mark of what Christ wants for us. He wants us to both:

1. *Rely* on Him to work in us
  2. *Strive* to live in a godly way
- It's difficult to hold both of these ideas in balance. Do you tend toward one of these extremes—trying to produce change on your own, or not putting in much effort at all? How so? How can you remind yourself to depend on Christ and obey Him?

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## DAY 2

We learn about Christ primarily through God's Word, but God also teaches us His truth through teachers, pastors, books, and even everyday conversations. If we stay alert, we can recognize God's truth in much of what we see and hear.

But this is just one part of learning. In addition to hearing truth, we must also receive it with humility.

► Read **Luke 8:4-15** and answer the question.

◉ What does the seed represent (v. 11)? **The Word of God** \_\_\_\_\_

► Complete the table below. In the second column, write what each soil represents.

**Type of Soil**  
(vv. 5-8)

**Meaning (vv. 12-15)**

<b>Roadside</b>	<b>Wording may vary. Hearing, but the devil takes it away so they won't believe and be saved</b>
<b>Rocky</b>	<b>Receiving the word, but falling away during temptation/testing</b>
<b>Thorns</b>	<b>Distraction by cares/worries, riches, and pleasures, and failing to bear fruit to maturity/perfection</b>
<b>Good</b>	<b>Receiving the word, holding it, and bearing fruit with patience/perseverance</b>



### ***CHECK YOUR BEARINGS***

- ▶ Think about which soil best represents your heart when you hear God's Word. What things might distract you from receiving and applying God's truth?

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- ▶ How can you better avoid these distractions?

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After telling this parable, Jesus shares another picture of those who hear and do God's Word (Luke 8:16). Jesus described a lighted lamp placed on a stand for everyone to see. It'd be foolish to light a lamp and then just hide it under a bed. Likewise, why would we spend time learning God's truth but never show it through our actions?

As Jesus spoke, His mother and brothers approached, and someone told Him that His family wanted to see Him. Jesus explained that His true family were those who hear the Word of God and do it (v. 21). If we accept and obey Christ's words, we too can be close to Him.

Don't stop listening to God's Word. Take every opportunity to learn, and challenge yourself to put truth into practice.

## DAY 3

As noted in the Teacher’s Lesson, Ephesians shares many similar themes with Colossians. Paul even begins the letters with similar greetings and prayers. In the opening of Ephesians, Paul doesn’t explicitly mention the gospel, but he does reference it by describing our redemption.

► Read **Ephesians 1:3-8** and match the question to the correct answer.

<b>A</b>	<b>Verse 3</b> – What has God given us in Christ?	<b>A.</b> Every spiritual blessing <b>B.</b> His children <b>C.</b> Holy and blameless <b>D.</b> The riches of His grace <b>E.</b> Redemption and forgiveness
<b>C</b>	<b>Verse 4</b> – When God chose us, what did He intend for us to be?	
<b>B</b>	<b>Verse 5</b> – Now that God has adopted us, what are we?	
<b>E</b>	<b>Verse 7</b> – What two things do we have in Christ?	
<b>D</b>	<b>Verses 7-8</b> – What has God shared with us?	



### **CHECK YOUR BEARINGS**

- ▶ In this passage, how would you describe God's attitude toward us?

**Answers will vary. Loving, giving, gracious**

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It's one thing to have this attitude out of a general goodwill, but God offers us His love even though we have wronged Him. We committed offenses against God Himself. We rejected Him, but He pained Himself to save us from our sin, and He continues to love us and help us.

So if we want to live in the gospel, we must show to others the same selfless love that God gave us.



## *TRAIL MAP*

Read **Colossians 1:9-12**. What does Paul pray for the Colossian believers?  
What does he hope for them?

# Lesson Two

## Walking Worthy

### Primary Text

Colossians 1:9–12

### Content Objectives

- Believers should continue to learn about God in order to grow in wisdom.
- To walk worthy of God means to live in a way that reflects our status as children of God.

### Lesson

In Colossians 1:1–8, Paul briefly reviewed the Colossians' spiritual history. Because the gospel had been effective in Colossae, these believers were living in faith and love for Christ and others. In verses 9–12, Paul explains his prayers for each of the Colossians.

**Read Colossians 1:9–12.**

## ***PAUL'S PRAYER REQUESTS FOR BELIEVERS (VV. 9–11)***

God's transforming work isn't over when we accept Christ. When we accept the gospel, God begins to change us from the inside out to be more like Him. As we learn about God, this happens through a transformation of our minds, wills, emotions, and spirits.

It would be nice if this were a linear process, but in truth, it's not. We face setbacks. We struggle with sin, or maybe sometimes we feel like God is distant. But even during these times, we can be confident that God is still working in us.

## *TO INCREASE IN KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL WITH WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING (V. 9)*

This phrase forms the main request of Paul's prayer. Although the Colossians had already believed on Christ, they needed to continue learning and growing in faith. Paul's prayer is that these believers would learn more about what God wanted for them.

### *WE LEARN ABOUT GOD'S WILL THROUGH SCRIPTURE.*

How do we find out what God wants for each of us? He reveals His will for us in Scripture. God wants us to know Him. He doesn't leave us to guess at what He wants. He gives us Scripture so we can know and do His will.

In the Old Testament, God revealed His will to individuals and later gave His Law to Israel. God made His character and expectations clear by talking with people, working through events, and giving the Law. As a result, the Israelites never had to wonder what God expected from them.

**Read Matthew 22:36–40.** Jesus summarized the entire Law in two commands: to love God and love others. Love is important because God Himself is love—it is an essential part of who He is. If we're to act like Him, we too should love.

God has given us Scripture so that we can know His will. In addition to Scripture, He's also given us church scholars and teachers to help us understand the words of Scripture.

**Discuss:** Who has God used to help you understand Scripture?

### *WISDOM IS APPLYING OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.*

Wisdom, the skill of using the knowledge we gain, might rely on strategy and intelligence. Spiritual wisdom, however, is something that comes only from God. Jesus, illustrating wisdom, said that anyone who listened and practiced His words would be like a man who built his house on a firm rock foundation. That man's house protected him when a storm came. However, the foolish man who built his house on a foundation of sand lost his house to the storm (Matt. 7:24–27).

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of teachings and sayings about wisdom—and the lack of it. In Proverbs, we learn that knowing God goes hand in hand with wisdom. Proverbs 1:7 states that reverence for God is the foundation for knowledge.

**Read Proverbs 2:6-9.** Wisdom from God preserves us. The more we rely on God for His wisdom and His truth, the better we can pursue what is just and right.

We gain real wisdom by knowing God's principles and understanding knowledge. And the Holy Spirit guides us to understand God's Word.

**Read Ephesians 1:16-17,** the parallel passage to Colossians 1:9. Here, Paul reveals that this understanding and revelation is from God.

### *WE LEARN AND UNDERSTAND BETTER WITH TIME AND OBEDIENCE.*

The Holy Spirit helps us to internalize, understand, and apply God's words as we read and meditate on the Bible. The Spirit will bring these truths to mind and prompt us to put them in action. We must consistently live out God's truths and let them direct our words and actions.

In addition to the Holy Spirit's work, we need time to get better at living out God's truth. As with any skill, the return we get depends on the amount of time we invest.

### *WALKING WORTHY OF GOD AND DESIRING TO PLEASE HIM IN ALL THINGS (V. 10)*

The purpose of knowing and understanding God's will is that we will *do* God's will. What good is it to know *what* to do, but not actually *do* it? Knowing is the first step to doing, and the two go together.

### *WALKING IS AN ONGOING PROCESS.*

Scripture often uses *walk* to mean "living" or "doing," the ongoing process of obeying God. Imagine navigating your spiritual life as hiking a trail in the woods. We are always moving toward the end of the trail where we can relax and eat lunch. We might stop every now and then or retrace our steps, but ultimately, we keep moving forward. When Paul prays that the believers walk worthy of God, he is asking that they advance in their spiritual lives the way God wants them to.

**Read Psalm 26:1-12.** Here, David describes regularly living in God's truth. His actions are contrasted against the actions of those who do evil.

## *WALKING WORTHY OF GOD MEANS LIVING OUT WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST.*

When we talk about worthiness, we usually mean meeting a standard or measuring up. In the story of King Arthur, only the true king could pull the sword Excalibur out of the stone. It would not budge for anyone else. Arthur was able to remove the sword because he was worthy—he was the true king.

**Discuss:** Is Paul saying that we need to measure up to God's standard when he prays that believers will walk worthy of Christ? Why or why not? When Paul tells believers to live worthy of God, He isn't saying that we need to compete for God's favor. God has already accepted us—not because of what we've done, but because He has chosen us.

In this verse, *worthy* simply means "befitting" or "characteristic of." We are God's children already, so we should reflect what God is like—not what sin is like.

If we live in a way that honors Christ, we will apply godly wisdom to every part of our lives. It will affect our relationships, free time, decisions, priorities, thoughts, and words.

## *PLEASING GOD MEANS CHOOSING HIM RATHER THAN SIN.*

What does it mean to please God? The Book of Romans, another letter written by Paul, gives us a clue.

**Read Romans 8:6-9.** Before we followed Christ, we were controlled by our *flesh*—that is, our old sin nature. We did whatever we wanted, whether it was right or not. We even thought differently. Generally, we couldn't say "no" to sin. While we were living for our flesh, we were headed toward death—eternal separation from God. Even if we were nice people, we were apathetic at best, and hostile at worst, toward God.

Verses 7-8 tell us that in this state, we could not please God. We were unable to please God because we did not obey Him or do His will—His Law.

When we accepted and followed Christ, the Holy Spirit came to us and began dwelling in us. Now that the Spirit lives in us, we can say "no" to sin and "yes" to God. We can choose to listen to and obey the Spirit. This Spirit-led living is what pleases God.

God alone is the source of good, joy, love, and justice. So when we try to get those things from somewhere else, we sin.

When we sin, we not only grieve God, but we also damage ourselves. We pursue the things that are only found in God, and in the process, we bring ourselves a world of hurt. Searching for these qualities in the world is useless—only God is the source. As a result, we die spiritually, because we are cut off from our only source of spiritual life.

If we choose God, accept His truth, and do His will, we bless ourselves. Followers of Christ will not make a pattern of turning away from God. Because we have that old desire to sin, we may still struggle to choose God. But God put His Spirit in us to help us reject sin.

## ***BEARING FRUIT IN EVERY GOOD WORK (V. 10)***

In Scripture, the analogy of “fruit” is often used to describe our actions. A tomato plant only grows tomatoes, and a mango tree only grows mangos. Similarly, our actions will always reflect our true character.

*“FRUIT” DESCRIBES HOW WE ACT OUT OUR FAITH.*

**Read Matthew 7:15–23.** Jesus said that people’s actions—the fruit they produce—are a natural reflection of who they are on the inside.

No one can hide who they really are—at least, not for very long. Even if people carefully guard their words and actions, they will eventually reveal what they are really like. We can spot hypocrisy in others—they act one way around some people and then act the complete opposite around others.

A Christian who lives by godly principles will produce godly actions. However, a Christian who lives by the flesh and gives in to the pull of sin will produce sinful actions.

So just like a tomato plant will always produce tomatoes, not mangos, we will always produce actions consistent with what we believe.

## ***FAITH RESULTS IN DOING GOOD WORKS.***

When we live how a believer should, we will naturally do what God wants. We will give to those in need (see Matt. 6:3), care for those with no family support (see James 1:27), and encourage other Christians (see 1 Thess. 5:11). This lifestyle is putting godly love into action.

Sometimes Christians try to skip the first part of the process—that is, cultivating faith in Jesus Christ—and jump straight into doing good works. But the reasons behind these actions are just as important as the actions themselves. Intent matters. It’s possible to do the right thing but for the wrong reason—like the Pharisees who made a big show of giving money to the poor so others would praise the Pharisees (see Matt. 6:2–4). God

wants both a willing heart and working hands. Our deeds should be the natural outflow of our inner transformation.

**Read Galatians 5:19–23.** The list in these verses describes two different lifestyles—one that gives into the flesh and one that is led by the Holy Spirit. In Christians, the Holy Spirit produces these fruits, which should flow into what we do.

## *INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (V. 10)*

Paul prays that the believers will continue to learn about God. Learning is a lifelong activity that takes work. We need time to read Scripture and meditate on it. Making room in our busy schedules for these activities can sometimes be a challenge, but learning God's Word should be a top priority.

The early Christian church relied largely on oral teaching and written letters to help them understand Scripture. But today, we have many resources to help us understand God's Word, such as:

- Trained teachers and pastors
- Bible study groups
- Christian schools and universities
- Language scholarship to improve accuracy in Bible translation
- Many Bible translations to choose from, as well as study Bibles
- Books, papers, articles, blogs, commentaries, and podcasts

There's almost too much to list. If we need resources to increase our knowledge of God, we don't have to look far.

## *STRENGTHENED FOR ENDURANCE AND PATIENCE (V. 11)*

Paul prays for strength for these believers so that they can endure. Sometimes the words *steadfastness*, *patience*, or *longsuffering* are used to mean endurance. These words refer to facing difficulty over a long period of time.

### *THIS STRENGTH COMES FROM GOD.*

We will face many challenges to our faith. We will have internal fears and worries. We might also experience external threats, like persecution and danger.

When these challenges arise, we can't rely on our own strength to continue trusting God. We need His help to endure faithfully to the end. Remember that this perseverance is produced by the Holy Spirit (see Gal. 5:22).

### *WE CAN REJOICE OVER GOD'S CARE.*

Because God "has our back," we have a great reason for joy—no matter what circumstances we must endure. No matter what challenges we face, we know that God will take care of us and hold us safely in His hands. He will never leave us.

Joy comes from a proper focus. If we focus only on our circumstances or our weaknesses, we will easily grow discouraged. Choose to focus on God's power, love, and goodness. Focus on how you can trust Him completely.

## ***PAUL'S PRAISE TO GOD (V. 12)***

### *WE HAVE A HEAVENLY INHERITANCE IN JESUS CHRIST (V. 12).*

Paul states again that, as God's children, we meet a standard which qualifies us to receive a spiritual inheritance. Again, God put us in this position. We did nothing to earn this status. Out of His own goodness and love, God freely gives us this inheritance.

What is our inheritance in Christ? Many things, including . . .

- The Holy Spirit
- Eternal life
- God's endless grace and help
- Knowledge of God's will
- A future of eternal fellowship with God

**Read Ephesians 1:13-14.** Here, Paul states that the Holy Spirit is a symbol of God's promise of our future inheritance.

### *WE ARE PEOPLE OF LIGHT (V. 12).*

In Scripture, imagery of light and darkness is used to illustrate righteousness and sin (cf. Matt. 5:16; John 1:4-9; 3:19; 1 John 1:5-10). Jesus is even described as a light to a dark world.

**Discuss:** Why do you think Scripture uses light and darkness to describe righteousness and sin? The two are opposites, and people generally like light so that they can move around easily and avoid hurting themselves.

**Read John 8:12.** Jesus calls Himself the light of the world. Like light, He reveals truth to us and gives us freedom. But evil, like darkness, obscures the truth and hides danger.

As followers of Jesus, we share His identity. We are people of light, reflecting Jesus' goodness to the world around us.

## ***CONCLUSION***

God, through His salvation, has called us to be His people through Jesus Christ. Now, He calls us to live as His people—to reflect Him in everything we think, say, and do.

We can better live like Him by learning more about God and what He wants for us. If we live to please God and bear good fruit from the Spirit, we are doing what God wants for us. God helps us with this process by giving us strength to persevere in our Christian life. We can take joy in the fact that we are God's children, heirs of His promises, and people of His light.

## LESSON OUTLINE • COLOSSIANS 1:9-12

### Paul's Prayer Requests for Believers (vv. 9-11)

- ▶ To **increase** \_\_\_\_\_ in knowledge of God's will with wisdom and understanding (v. 9)
  - ◉ We learn about God's will through **Scripture** \_\_\_\_\_.
  - ◉ **Wisdom** \_\_\_\_\_ is applying our knowledge of God.
  - ◉ We learn and understand better with **time** \_\_\_\_\_ and **obedience** \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ Walking worthy of God and desiring to please Him in all things (v. 10)
  - ◉ Walking is an **ongoing** \_\_\_\_\_ process.
  - ◉ Walking worthy of God means **living out** \_\_\_\_\_ who we are in Christ.
  - ◉ Pleasing God means **choosing** \_\_\_\_\_ Him rather than sin.
- ▶ Bearing fruit in every good **work** \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 10)
  - ◉ "Fruit" describes how we **act** \_\_\_\_\_ out our faith.
  - ◉ **Faith** \_\_\_\_\_ results in doing good works.
- ▶ Increasing in the **knowledge** \_\_\_\_\_ of God (v. 10)
- ▶ Strengthened for endurance and **patience** \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 11)
  - ◉ This strength comes from **God** \_\_\_\_\_.
  - ◉ We can **rejoice** \_\_\_\_\_ over God's care.





## DAY 1

- ▶ Read the summary below of **Colossians 1:9-12**. God wants our faith to be active. To show the dynamic nature of faith, underline or highlight all the **action** words.

Because of this [that the Colossians had received the gospel], from the first day we heard of it, we have not stopped praying for you and asking . . .

that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will

in all wisdom and spiritual understanding

walking worthily of the Lord

desiring to please Him in all things

producing fruit in every good work

and increasing in the knowledge of God

strengthened with all power

according to the might of His glory

in all perseverance and patience

with joy giving thanks to the father

who has made us fit to take part in the share of the saints in light.

- ▶ Answer the following questions.
  - ◉ In verse 9, what does Paul say should come along with our knowledge of God's will?

Spiritual wisdom and understanding/Wisdom and spiritual understanding

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Knowledge by itself isn't enough to change us. In addition to learning about God, we must also allow the Holy Spirit to help us understand and apply what we learn. Wisdom is applying our knowledge well.

- ▶ Read Paul's prayer in **Ephesians 1:15-19**. In verse 18, what two things does Paul want the believers to know?

1. The hope to which God has called us/The hope of His calling  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. The riches of His inheritance/the glory of His inheritance/His glorious inheritance  
\_\_\_\_\_



### ***CHECK YOUR BEARINGS***

- ▶ What is the hope we have in God? See **Romans 8:18, 23-25**.

Answers may vary. Future glory; the redemption of our bodies/body  
\_\_\_\_\_

- ▶ What is our inheritance? See **1 Peter 1:3-4, 9**.

Salvation  
\_\_\_\_\_

If we keep our hope and inheritance in mind, we can face our daily cares and troubles with greater confidence in Christ. Not only can we look forward to a future time when we'll be perfect with Christ, but we can take advantage of our inheritance right now. No matter how much sin is in the world, we know that God is working.

## DAY 2

From a human standpoint, God’s wisdom doesn’t make sense. Most people would trade real, lasting good for pleasure and comfort now. After all, how can we know for sure that we’ll receive good things in the future? It doesn’t make sense, humanly speaking, that we should make eternal life our goal instead of pleasure. But following Christ means sacrificing present comfort to gain the best future comfort.

► Read **1 Corinthians 1:18–31** and answer the questions.

- ◉ Is the world able to know God through its own wisdom (v. 21)?

**No** \_\_\_\_\_

- ◉ Who embodies the power and wisdom of God (v. 24)?

**Christ** \_\_\_\_\_

Using irony, Paul calls God’s wisdom “foolishness.” God’s wisdom appears foolish to the world, yet it is absolute truth. God’s wisdom is so powerful because it’s His alone. No one else can take credit for it.

- ◉ Why does God choose the “weak and foolish” (v. 29)?

**So no one can boast/glory.** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

God’s power shines through clearly when we depend on His strength to obey Him. God isn’t looking for spiritual superheroes with impressive Christian résumés. He invites us as we are—with all our weaknesses, struggles, and failures—to rely on Him to live out His words.



### ***CHECK YOUR BEARINGS***

▶ Choose one of the following subjects and briefly describe how the world's wisdom differs from God's on this topic.

- Success
- The value of a person
- Friends, family, or love interests
- What happens after death

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## DAY 3

► Read **1 Corinthians 2:6-16** and answer the following questions.

- ◉ How does Paul describe God's wisdom (v. 7)?

A secret/mystery, ordained/predestined for our glory before time/  
the world/ages.

We can know God, relate to Him, and learn about Him. But we cannot *fully* comprehend God. We can never fully understand everything about Him or His thoughts, because God is entirely different from us. We have similar examples from our world, things that we know a little about but can't fully understand—dark matter, creating life, why there's a light in the refrigerator but not the freezer. But we have a better chance of figuring out these things than we do of fully understanding God.

Paul describes God's wisdom as a mystery—we know what God has chosen to share with us, but we can't fully understand it.

- ◉ How does God reveal His wisdom to us (v. 10)?

Through the Spirit

- ◉ Without the Spirit, can we receive God's wisdom (v. 14)?

No

God's wisdom must be revealed to us supernaturally, and we have to be willing to receive it. Jesus told His disciples the same thing when they asked why He taught with parables instead of plain teaching (see Matt. 13:10-17).

God reveals His wisdom supernaturally because He wants our faith to rest on Him alone (see 1 Cor. 2:5). We can't accept the truths of God through our own finite understanding or through the world's wisdom.

- ◉ Whose mind do we have to help us (v. 16)?

Christ's

 **CHECK YOUR BEARINGS**

Receiving and understanding God's truth depends on two things:

1. Humility
2. Depending on the Holy Spirit

► Are you willing to learn from God—and not just learn but also apply His wisdom? What makes it difficult to do this?

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 **TRAIL MAP**

Read **Colossians 1:13-17**. What do you think it means that Jesus is the “first-born” (v. 15)?

# Lesson Three

## The Hymn of Christ, Part 1

### Primary Text

Colossians 1:13–17

### Content Objectives

- Paul describes Christ and His many roles.
- Christ redeemed us by rescuing us from sin and forgiving us.
- Christ is a perfect reflection of God the Father.
- Christ holds a position of prominence and privilege as God's Son.
- Everything was created by Jesus Christ.

### Lesson

After his prayer, Paul praises Jesus Christ. Christ makes it possible for us to share in His light and to inherit God's promises (Col. 1:12). Paul's description of Jesus is a reminder about who Christ is and what He has done for us. Jesus is the foundation—and the *only* foundation—for our faith. This message is the whole point of Paul's letter.

Colossians 1:13–20 takes a different form than Paul's prayer. Many people think this passage may be an adaptation of an early hymn. This poem focuses on Christ, His roles, and His influence on believers. Ephesians 1:3–14 contains a parallel topic of Christ and His work, but in an expanded and non-poetic form.

**Teacher's Note:** Typically, Colossians 1:13–20 follows a chiastic structure. This literary structure is used often in the New Testament. It takes the following form:

**A**

**B**

**C** (The central point)

**B'**

**A'**

This is a very simplified form to illustrate the nesting structure of chiasm. Some chiastic structures contain more levels, and some lines may not have an explicit parallel. Further, chiasms may be arranged differently—by ideas or syntax. The takeaway from this structure is that Paul put forethought into his writing and organized it to reinforce his message about Christ.

**A.** Christ is the redeemer (vv. 13–14)

**B.** Christ as the image of God (v. 15)

**C.** Christ as creator and sustainer (vv. 16–17)

**D.** Christ is the head of the church (v. 18)

**C'.** Christ as the beginning of all, the firstborn from the dead (v. 18)

**B'.** Christ has the fullness of God dwelling in Him (v. 19)

**A'.** Christ as reconciler (v. 20)

## ***CHRIST THE REDEEMER (VV. 13–14)***

To begin, Paul focuses on how Christ redeemed us. Christ is the foundation of the church because He created it. The church simply wouldn't exist without His work, because it's made up of those Christ redeemed.

## ***GOD DELIVERED AND TRANSFERRED US INTO LIGHT (V. 13)***

Paul continues his light and darkness imagery from verse 12. God made us people of light. In doing so, He saved us from the power of darkness—that is, sin.

*JUST AS LIGHT AND DARKNESS ARE OPPOSITES, JESUS AND SIN HAVE NO PART IN EACH OTHER.*

At the end of the previous lesson, we talked about Scripture's use of light and darkness to symbolize righteousness and sin. Sin is pictured as darkness because it obscures truth and traps us.

**Read John 1:4–5.** Jesus is the opposite of sin. He brings life, peace, and knowledge of God. Sin brings death, despair, and separation from God.

*JESUS RESCUED US FROM THE POWER OF SIN.*

Through Jesus, God saved us from the power of sin. The Greek word *Christos* was translated the Hebrew word *Messiah*, meaning "anointed." Anointing was a practice to symbolize choosing or commissioning someone for a task. Throughout Israel's history, God appointed many human leaders to lead His people. These "messiahs" were forerunners or pictures of the greatest Messiah—Jesus. Jesus not only delivers us from difficulty, but He also saves us from sin, the greatest threat of all.

Jesus didn't only save us from sinning. He also removed us from sin's control and brought us into Jesus' kingdom of light. We have freedom instead of oppression and wisdom instead of foolishness. As citizens of His kingdom, we gain all the benefits of being in God's family.

*CHRIST BROUGHT US BACK TO GOD (V. 14).*

To *redeem* means to pay to reclaim something which once belonged to you. If your jacket ends up in lost and found, you can reclaim it by paying a small fee. The jacket already belongs to you, but you can't access it until you redeem it with money. *Redemption* is a transactional term, somewhat like *ransom*.

We have always belonged to God. He created us, after all. But when humanity turned away from Him, we placed ourselves under the dominion of sin. Because God wasn't content to let us go our own way, He set in motion His plan to save us while satisfying His own justice against sin. God took the judgment for sin on Himself through Jesus' death. By paying the demands of sin, God bought us back—He redeemed us.

This picture of a transaction is just one way to describe what Jesus did for us. We shouldn't view salvation *only* as a transaction, however.

- God doesn't barter. He doesn't need to, because He is sovereign. He is not limited by the forces of evil.

- Further, He is a Person, not a bank. If we forget this, we reduce our sin to mere spiritual debt. Sin loses its gravity and atrocity. But in truth, when we sin, we insult a Person.

While we shouldn't reduce God's forgiveness to a transaction, the concept of redemption can help us better understand how Christ saved us. It reveals that God loves His creation of humanity, and that He refuses to surrender His creation to sin.

## ***CHRIST FORGAVE OUR SINS (V. 14).***

In rescuing us from sin's hold, God also forgave our sins. All sin is against God, because sin is turning away from God. But God, out of His mercy, love, and goodness, let go of our offenses against Him. But the consequences of our sin had to be dealt with, or else God would not be just. God took the worst of our consequences and paid for them Himself.

## ***CHRIST THE IMAGE OF GOD (V. 15)***

When you cross a bridge over a pond or walk by a large puddle, you see your own reflection in the water. That reflection is not really you—it's just light bouncing off the surface of water. But your reflection shows exactly what you look like.

Similarly, Jesus is the reflection of God. Jesus is God, yet He is also a distinct Person from God the Father. Jesus perfectly shows us what the Father is like.

## ***WE CAN'T PHYSICALLY SEE GOD.***

God does not have a body like we do. He is a spirit, so we can't see Him (John 4:24). He is very different from humans.

We depend on our senses to move through this world, and we tend to trust what we *can* see over what we *can't* see. Many religions have statues or paintings of their gods or founders which their followers sometimes worship. But God never wanted His followers to make images of Him (Exo. 20:3–6).

**Discuss:** Why might making images of God would be a bad idea?

First, no one can accurately picture God, so they would likely end up making Him into something like themselves—making God in their own image. Second, people would inevitably begin worshiping the image instead of God, as Aaron and the Israelites did with the golden calf (Exo. 32:1–35).

God does not want us to make Him in our image—to bring Him down to human level. He wants us to come to Him in faith and trust—to take Him as He is. No human—except Jesus Christ—could ever represent God accurately.

## ***BUT JESUS GAVE US A PERFECT PICTURE OF WHAT GOD IS LIKE.***

Jesus is the only one who has ever perfectly shown what God is like. Because Jesus is both God and human, He is the bridge between finite humans and our infinite God.

**Read 1 John 4:12.** No one has seen God with their eyes. But we can sort of see a reflection of Him in people who show His love. Just as children resemble their parents in looks, speech, or mannerisms, we too resemble our Father by our actions.

Through His kindness, Jesus showed what God's love is like. He showed God's power through His miracles. He showed God's truth by speaking it, even to people who threatened and persecuted Him.

## ***CHRIST THE FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION (V. 15)***

Jesus has always existed because He is God, and God has always existed. There has never been a time when Jesus did not exist. He never began existing. He always has been and always will be. So, what does "firstborn" mean when it comes to Jesus?

While the term "firstborn" can refer to the eldest child born in a family, it can also be a symbolic title. God calls a number of people His "firstborn" including the Messiah (Ps. 89:27) and Israel as a whole (Exo. 4:22; Jer. 31:9). Using "firstborn" this way emphasizes inherent privileges and responsibilities.

**Discuss:** Do you think the oldest child in your family is treated differently, or that they are given different privileges and responsibilities? What are they?

## ***THE FIRSTBORN IN A FAMILY HELD SPECIAL HONOR AND DUTIES.***

In Jewish culture, the firstborn belonged to God. Even the firstborn animal was dedicated to God. At the birth of a firstborn child, the parents would make a special offering to God (see Exo. 13:1; 34:19–20). The firstborn son also had special privileges and duties. After his father passed away, this child would become the head of the family, and he would receive a larger inheritance than his younger siblings.

## *THE FIRSTBORN RECEIVED FAVOR AND AN INHERITANCE.*

Jesus is the firstborn of God in the sense that He is favored by God and that He “inherits” all of creation (see Heb. 1:2). He was not birthed or created, but God sent Him to Earth. For this reason, Scripture often calls Jesus the “Son” and God the “Father.”

**Read Psalm 2:1-12.** This psalm speaks of God and His “Anointed”—that is, someone set apart for a special task. Here, it points to Jesus, God’s Son.

As the firstborn, Jesus is preeminent, or supreme, over creation.<sup>2</sup> He holds the highest honor over it because He is God and because He existed before creation.

## *CHRIST THE CREATOR (VV. 16-17)*

God created everything. In this verse, Paul states that God made the world in, or by, Jesus Christ.

**Read John 1:1-3.** Jesus played a key role in bringing the world into existence. Jesus was always with God, and He always was God—distinct from the Father, yet united with Him and the Spirit.

## *GOD MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE (V. 16).*

Through Jesus, God made both the material and the spiritual. Scripture often uses “heaven and earth” to describe both the spiritual and physical realms. God’s creation is comprehensive. Jesus rules all things we can see, and even the things we can’t see.

## *GOD MADE ALL AUTHORITY AND POWER (V. 16).*

All authority and powers were created through and by Jesus. Christ is superior to all human rulers, and He is superior to all spiritual beings, as well.<sup>3</sup> Later in this letter, Paul warns against people who teach that we should worship angels (2:18). In Colossians 2:8 and 2:20, Paul warns against following elementary powers—spiritual beings—rather than following Christ. Paul may have a particular teaching about the worship of these beings in mind. But spiritual beings and everything else are subservient to Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 120; N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 75.

<sup>3</sup> Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 121-123.

## ***CHRIST PRECEDED ALL OF THESE THINGS (V. 17).***

When Paul states, “Christ is before all things,” he could mean that Christ is supreme in either rank or temporal ordering—that Christ is prominent over everything, or that Christ existed before everything else. Douglas Moo points out that Scripture commonly uses this phrase in the latter sense. Moo suggests that Paul is affirming Christ’s preexistence here.<sup>4</sup> Christ existed before anything was created.

Christ holds supreme authority over all human and spiritual forces. He has power even over death itself.

**Read Hebrews 2:14-15.** Jesus died, then rose again. When He rose from the dead, He broke Satan’s power over death. Christ submits to nothing but God.

## ***CHRIST SUSTAINS ALL THINGS (V. 17).***

When everything in the world is working as it should, we pay little attention to it. But when things break—in times of fire, flood, pandemic, or war—we’re reminded that our world is fragile. One minute, we assume everything will continue like it always has, and the next minute, our world falls apart. We can’t fathom what the future holds.

We take comfort that God through Christ both created the world and sustains it. No disaster will ever surprise God. God will never abandon what He has made.

## ***CONCLUSION***

Jesus is greater than anyone or anything.

- He has power over all evil.
- He is the redeemer of His people.
- He freed us from sin and put us into His kingdom.
- He has power over all His creation because He made it and sustains it.
- He holds power over all other powers and authorities.

Because Jesus is the highest and greatest, we can trust Him to lead and protect us.

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<sup>4</sup> Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 125.

## COLOSSIANS 1:13–17

In Colossians 1:13–20, Paul arranges his points in a chiastic form. This is a funnel shape intended to emphasize Paul’s main point—that Christ is the founder and sustainer of the church.

- A.** Christ is the redeemer (vv. 13–14).
- B.** Christ as the image of God (v. 15)
- C.** Christ as creator and sustainer (vv. 16–17)
- D.** Christ is the head of the church (v. 18).
- C!** Christ as the beginning of all, the firstborn from the dead (v. 18)
- B!** Christ has the fullness of God dwelling in Him (v. 19).
- A!** Christ as reconciler (v. 20)

Because Christ is the head of the church, He is the ultimate authority for the belief and practice of His followers. Later in this letter, Paul argues that Christ alone is the foundation for our spiritual growth.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Christ the Redeemer \_\_\_\_\_ (vv. 13–14)

- ▶ God **delivered** \_\_\_\_\_ and transferred us into light (v. 13).
  - ◉ Just as light and darkness are opposites, Jesus and **sin** \_\_\_\_\_ have no part in each other.
  - ◉ Jesus **rescued** \_\_\_\_\_ us from the power of sin.
- ▶ Christ brought us back to God (v. 14).
- ▶ Christ **forgave** \_\_\_\_\_ our sins (v. 14).



# DAY 1

Colossians 1:13–20 describes Jesus’ authority over all areas of life—material and spiritual. Christ has the power to forgive sin, heal sickness, reverse death, and deliver God’s judgment.

While Jesus ministered on Earth, He didn’t insist that He was God and demand that people worship Him. Instead, He perfectly reflected the Father and allowed people to make up their minds about who He was. Each person had to decide personally whether to believe and follow Him—or to condemn and reject Him.

► Read **Luke 5:17–26** and answer the questions. In this story, Jesus does something that only God can do. He then leaves people to decide for themselves what to believe about Him.

- ◉ Who were part of the audience as Jesus was teaching (v. 17)?

**Pharisees and teachers/doctors of the law**

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- ◉ How did the sick man’s friends reveal their faith in Jesus? What do you think they wanted Jesus to do (vv. 18–19)?

**They brought the sick man into the crowded house. They likely wanted Jesus to heal him.**

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- ◉ Surprisingly, Jesus didn’t heal the man right away. What did He do first (v. 20)?

**Forgave his sins**

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- ◉ Why did Jesus’ words bother the Pharisees and experts of the Law (v. 21)?

**Only God could forgive sin, and they believed Jesus was just a man.**

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- Though they didn't object out loud, their indignation didn't escape Jesus. How did Jesus demonstrate that He had the power to forgive sin (v. 24)?

**He healed the sick man.** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- In verse 26, how did people respond when they saw what happened?

**They glorified/praised God and were filled with fear/awe.** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

 **CHECK YOUR BEARINGS**

Like the people who witnessed Jesus' miracles, we have to make up our minds about Jesus and accept Him by faith.

- Take some time to think about Jesus' authority to forgive sin. Why can only God forgive sin?

**Answers may vary. Because sin is committed against God.** \_\_\_\_\_

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We tend to focus on God's healing power—often reflected in our prayer requests. It's good to ask God to ease suffering, heal sick people, or mend broken relationships. But if we focus only on His healing power, we can easily forget how incredible it is that God can forgive our sins.

## DAY 2

After Jesus' ascension into heaven, His followers waited for the promised arrival of the Holy Spirit. After they received the Holy Spirit, they all praised God and miraculously proclaimed God's truth by speaking in different languages. People were confused, and they thought that maybe these disciples were drunk. Peter explained that their actions—and the coming of Jesus—were actually the fulfillment of God's promises.

Peter then shared a powerful message and rebuke to the people listening. Remember, these were the same people who had recently demanded that Jesus be executed. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection were still very fresh events in their minds.

► Read **Acts 2:22-36** and fill in the blanks in the summary of this passage.

Jesus did miracles/mighty works, wonders, and signs with the power of God. This showed God's approval of Him (v. 22). Jesus was killed unjustly by the Jews—even though it was part of God's plan for redemption (v. 23). But God raised Jesus from the dead, because it was impossible/not possible for death to hold Him in its power (v. 24).

David prophesied Christ's resurrection (v. 25). David could not have been speaking merely of his own physical death because his tomb/sepulchre still existed with them (v. 29). Rather, he was speaking of the Christ/Messiah (v. 31). This was Jesus (v. 32).

 **CHECK YOUR BEARINGS**

Every person you know will die one day. Death is unescapable. The fear of death has driven people to do some astounding things, like carrying out adrenaline-fueled rescues and spending millions on anti-aging research. Death is one of the most powerful forces in our world. Everything dies.

But death has no power over Jesus. Christ brought people back from the dead. He Himself rose again from the dead after three days. Only Christ has the power to refuse death and to give life.

- ▶ How does Jesus' power over death affect your concerns for the future?

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- ▶ Does this make you more or less comfortable trusting God's promises for the future? Why?

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## DAY 3

God gave the Apostle John visions of the future—visions that were confusing, terrifying, and incredible. After giving messages for seven churches, God revealed to John who would initiate the events of the last days and judge sin.

► Read **Revelation 5:1-14** and answer the questions.

- ◉ John saw an angel holding a book with seven seals. Why did John weep at the angel's words (vv. 2-4)?

No one was worthy to open it.

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- ◉ But there was one who was found worthy to open the book. Who was this (v. 5)?

The Lion of/that is from the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David (Jesus)

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This is a reference to Jesus as the Messiah. His coming was foretold throughout Israel's history—what He would be like, what He would do, and even that He would be a descendant of King David. Jesus' connection to David revealed Jesus' status as king.

- ◉ He appeared as a slain **lamb** \_\_\_\_\_ with seven horns and eyes (v. 6).
- ◉ When He took the book, the 24 elders worshiped Him. They said He was worthy because He was **slain** \_\_\_\_\_ and had **redeemed/purchased/ransomed** \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 9) people with His blood.

- ◉ Then thousands sang and said that the Lamb was worthy to receive power, riches/wealth, wisdom, might/strength, honor/honour and blessing/glory and praise (v. 12).



### ***CHECK YOUR BEARINGS***

- ▶ When the book opened, God’s judgment on sin began in the form of cataclysmic events on the earth. Note verses 9 and 12. In your own words, why is Jesus worthy to open the book?

Answers will vary. Jesus was killed for our sins. He faced God’s judgment for us.

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Read **Colossians 1:18-23**. How did Christ reconcile us to God?