

# small groups

**THE LETTER TO COLOSSIANS**  
*A CULTURE CHANGING BOOK*



**ST. ANDREW'S**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## WELCOME TO A GREAT BOOK!

Life is short! Although it may seem like it, the truth is, we don't have the luxury of time.

The primary purpose of this book is to understand more deeply who Christ is and how believing in him changes us so that we can impact our culture for Christ.

Friend, whether you have journeyed a long time with the Lord or are new in seeking him, this is a great book. Following the table of contents, there are a few suggestions to get you started.



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## BACKGROUND // LETTER TO COLOSSIANS

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### WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK?

Before Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Colossae, we learn from Colossians 2:1 that he had never been to their city. This helps explain the personal greetings he included at the end of the letter, a practice he usually reserved for letters to churches he had not visited (for example, Romans). Although Paul had apostolic authority, he was a relational man, seeking to develop personal connections with the people he hoped to teach and serve. The more personal tone at the close of this letter would have been especially significant in creating a connection with the Colossian believers, given the fact that part of Paul's reason for writing involved calling out the heretical teachers who had infiltrated the Colossian church.

### WHERE ARE WE IN HISTORY?

In AD 60–61, during his first of three imprisonments, Paul penned this letter to the Colossian church after he had received a report that they were struggling with a Christological heresy, meaning, the understanding of who Christ is as a person and in nature. The report came from Epaphras, likely the leader of the church at Colossae and a convert of Paul's from his more than two-year ministry in Ephesus. Epaphras had come to Rome in part to serve Paul during his imprisonment (Philemon 1:23) but also to disclose the dangerous teachings the Colossians were hearing and absorbing. So Paul sent this letter, along with the letters to Philemon and to the Ephesians, with Tychicus,

accompanied by Onesimus (Colossians; Philemon 1:10–12). Tychicus was a co-worker of Paul's who would have been able to help the Colossian believers understand and apply the apostle's teachings in the letter.<sup>1</sup>

### WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

More than any other New Testament book, this book defends the lordship of Christ. The church at Colossae was under attack from false teachers who threatened the church. This heresy resembled an early form of Gnosticism, which taught that Jesus was not fully God and fully man, but merely one of the semidivine beings that bridged the chasm between God and the world. Although Paul had never been to the church itself, he addressed these issues head-on with a fourfold purpose:

1. to expose and refute the lies;
2. to instruct the Colossians in the truth while alerting them to the danger of returning to their pagan and empty vices;

3. to convey his heart towards his Christian brothers and sisters;
4. to inspire them to live in harmony and love!

### HOW DOES THIS IMPACT ME?

We live in an age of religious pluralism and syncretism (watering down the truth for the sake of unity). The Lordship of Christ is irrelevant by many religious groups that believe “there are many ways to heaven.” THE abiding test of authentic Christianity is the church's earliest confession, “Jesus is Lord.” Do we allow him to be Lord over everything? Because of his divine nature, Jesus is sovereign, above all things with an authority given him by the Father. As such, Jesus is also Head over the church. He has reconciled all things to himself through his death on the cross, making believers alive to God and setting them on the path to right living.

<sup>1</sup>God's Masterwork, Chuck Swindoll



## GUIDELINES + TIPS

### GUIDELINES + TIPS

The digging deeper or inductive questions for each passage in Colossians are versatile enough to work in a one-on-one or group format. They can be used for Bible studies for Christians, seekers, or a mixture of the two.

### BEGINNING SUGGESTIONS

**+ Place** – Find a quiet place where you can study without being interrupted or distracted.

**+ Bible/Material** – Have a bible on hand or on your phone (if you have one). Try to get the same version if possible. We suggest the NIV.

**+ Number of Meetings** – There are 8 studies provided which are intended for 8 weeks. Agree on the amount of time together (1-1 ½ hours should be sufficient).

**+ Set Expectations** – Each section consists of five sections: an ice breaker, a sharing question, observation (inductive) questions, application questions and then a final wrap-

up question. The time you spend together will be informal where all questions are welcome.

### PRE-SMALL GROUP // TO DO ALONE

- 1. Start** by 3 minutes of silence and centering - Set an alarm if need be. Be aware of any distractions and ask God to help you focus. Praise him!
- 2. Read the selected passage first** – Be sure and read the passage entirely.
- 3. Questions** – Observation then application. These questions are meant to bring out the meaning of the passage and then apply what is meant.
- 4. Conclude** with 3 minutes of silence and surrender.

### DURING SMALL GROUP

- 1. Ice-breaker question**  
This is the first thing you ask at the start of your group. It's easy and adds a fun, get-to-know-you element. Each person would take no

more than 1 minute typically. Make sure there is an option of "passing" if someone does not want to share!

- 2. Sharing question** -  
A sharing question is provided for each study that is related to the passage. Again, make sure there is an option of "passing" if someone does not want to share!
- 3. Discuss the Observation** questions (pick 2 at least).
- 4. Discuss the Application** questions (discuss all).
- 5. Discuss the final wrap up** question.
- 6. End in prayer** for one another. Surrender and trust!

### NEW TO THE FAITH? INTERESTED IN BECOMING A CHRISTIAN?

If at any point someone would like to become a Christian, that's wonderful! Below are two examples of a simple prayer to receive Jesus into your heart.

*"Father, I believe in you and Jesus Christ, but my heart's most fundamental trust was elsewhere--in my own competency and decency. This has only gotten me into trouble. Today I give my heart to you. I transfer my trust to you,*

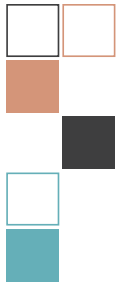
*and ask that you would receive and accept me not for anything I have done but because of everything Christ has done for me."*<sup>2</sup>

*"Dear Lord Jesus, I want a fresh start...a new beginning. I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. So right now, I repent (turn away from my sins) and invite you to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow you as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name, amen."*

### NOTE THAT EACH PRAYER HAD AN ELEMENT OF WHAT WE CALL "A.B.C."

- A:** Acknowledgement of one's personal sins and a desire to change
- B:** Belief for forgiveness of sin because of the work of Christ
- C:** Commit your life to the Lord and transfer seats: God is the pilot; you are now co-pilot. He knows how to navigate!

**If you just said this prayer,** welcome to the family of God. We are all a broken, at times, fragmented group, but we have the Lord who makes us whole. Please tell your small group leader or a church member this week! We are so thrilled for your faith journey. We are in it together!



# COLOSSIANS 1:1-14 // GROWTH IN CHRIST

## STUDY 1

### ICE-BREAKER

What is your favorite hobby and why?

### SHARING QUESTION

When did Christ first become real to you and how did you feel at the time?

### OBSERVATION (INDUCTIVE STUDY)

- 1. What is Paul’s tone in these opening remarks? How does Paul describe the faith of the Colossians (how they came to it, how it is expressed, Paul’s role in it, etc.)?
- 2. How does Paul describe the Gospel in Colossians 1:1-14? Why does Paul frame their experience in the bigger movement of God?

- 3. What is Paul’s desire for the Colossians in verses 9-14?
- 4. How is “knowledge of the will of God” described in verses 9-10? What is the purpose of that knowledge?

### APPLICATION: HOW MIGHT THIS IMPACT THE WAY I SEE AND LIVE?

- 1. What does it mean to “bear good fruit”? How does this relate to “growing in the knowledge of God” and “being strengthened with all power”?
- 2. What does Paul suggest as the reason for why the Colossians (and we) should give thanks?
- 3. How has the Father rescued us from the dominion of darkness?

- 4. Paul is encouraging the Colossians by reminding them of the Gospel and is challenging them to continue growing in Christ. Is there someone in your life who does the same for you? Who? If not, pray for that specifically!
- 5. What would it look like this week for you to pursue more of the “knowledge of the will of God” and “live in the light of the knowledge of the will of God (the Gospel)”? Be specific.

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### WRAP UP QUESTION

How might this group pray for your growth in Christ specifically this week?

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COLOSSIANS 1:15-23 // **THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST**

**STUDY 2**

**ICE-BREAKER**

What is one place you desire to visit that is on your “bucket list”?

**SHARING QUESTION**

As a kid, what superhero did you want to be? Why?

**OBSERVATION  
(INDUCTIVE STUDY)**

1. What does it mean that Jesus is the “image” of the invisible God?
2. What is the significance of being the first born in 1st century Jewish culture? What does “first born” of all creation mean?
3. What do you think Paul is getting at when he writes that “in him all things were created” and “all things were created through him and for him”?

4. How is Christ the head of the church?

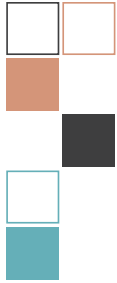
**APPLICATION: HOW MIGHT THIS IMPACT THE WAY I SEE AND LIVE?**

1. What does it mean to you that you were once “alienated” from Christ because of sin but now you’ve been reconciled, blameless, and above reproach in his sight (v. 21-22)?
2. In your response to #5, what will you do about that this week?
3. Which do you personally have more difficulty with: Understanding how Christ is Supreme or yielding your life to his Supremacy? Why?

**WRAP UP QUESTION**

Give one example of how you will yield to the Lordship of Christ this week (e.g., at work, school, home, neighborhood, etc.).

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COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:7 //  
**MYSTERY OF GOD**

**S T U D Y 3**

**ICE-BREAKER**

What aspect of your daily routine do you look forward to the most?

**SHARING QUESTION**

When did you first understand that being a Christian is all about establishing a close relationship with God?

**OBSERVATION  
(INDUCTIVE STUDY)**

**Note:** Paul now completes his introduction of himself. He does so with a remarkably full description of his ministry, in order, apparently, to ensure that the Colossians, who had until now only heard of him second-hand, would understand his reasons for writing. Having put them on the map of the divine purposes in Christ (1:21–23), Paul now places himself on

that same map. His writing at the present time is not an odd or arrogant venture. His whole ministry—his suffering, preaching, teaching, hard work and prayer—has had them in view for some time, and this letter is simply one more facet of his total God-given work, which includes responsibility for them.<sup>3</sup>

1. What “mystery of God” is now fully revealed in the gospel? (1:26, 27, 2:2)
2. Why is “Christ in you” a mystery? (1:27)
3. Why does Paul rejoice in his sufferings? For whom does he suffer?<sup>4</sup>
4. How does Paul show his pure motives by both his words and his deeds? (2:2)
5. What is a modern-day example of people with religious “fine arguments”? (2:4)

**APPLICATION: HOW MIGHT THIS IMPACT THE WAY I SEE AND LIVE?**

1. Paul is being persecuted as he writes this letter from jail. Here he emphasizes just how ironic it is that Christ, the ultimate Sufferer, can use tragic circumstances to manifest his presence (v24). When have you or someone you know experienced persecution, suffering or ridicule? How has this or might this possibly be used for good?
2. How might having “Christ IN you” help you be steadfast and firm in your faith? Give one specific example.
3. Is Paul’s stated purpose a reality in your life? (1:28; 2:2)
4. In whom should we be “rooted” (2:7)? How can we be “built up”? What are some of the implications of being “rooted” and “built up”?<sup>5</sup>

**WRAP UP QUESTION**

How will this lesson impact your life this week?

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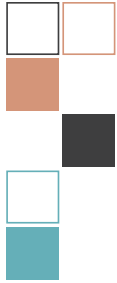
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<sup>3</sup>Wright, N. T. (1986). *Colossians and Philemon: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 12, p. 90). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.  
<sup>4</sup>Barry, J. D. (2014). *Colossians: Being Like Jesus* (p. 41). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.  
<sup>5</sup>Barry, J. D. (2014). *Colossians: Being Like Jesus* (p. 55). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



## COLOSSIANS 2:8-23 // BE ON ALERT! GOD'S WAY VS. THE WORLD'S WAY

### STUDY 4

#### ICE-BREAKER

What is the oddest food you have ever tried?

#### SHARING QUESTION

What type of education and philosophy have you learned about various religions?

#### OBSERVATION (INDUCTIVE STUDY)

1. What is an example of "hollow and deceptive philosophy"? What two things do the root of this thinking depend upon according to Paul in verse 8?
2. Paul's opponents were apparently teaching the requirement of additional practices and rules such as circumcision (2:9-12), restricted diets (2:16), self-denial disciplines (2:23), and ceremonies (2:16).

How does Paul refute that argument?

3. Paul uses the analogy of circumcision to describe the transformative work Christ has done in our lives. Circumcision was a symbol of God's covenant (his contract) with his people (Gen 17:15–27). But unlike physical circumcision, Christ's work is "made without hands" (2:11). What kind of circumcision is done by Christ and how did he do it? (2:11-15)
4. Paul says that we have been "buried" and "raised with Christ" (2:12). Read below what that means and then identify what this means (v. 13-15).
  - Our sins died with Christ on the cross—our debts were paid.

- Our sins were left in the tomb with Christ when we chose to believe in him—we don't have to suffer the consequences of them.
- We rose with Christ as new creations—meaning we can have a new, guilt-free life in relationship with God.

5. How does Paul's opponent's system create a "false humility" in verse 18? How does the system lead to being "puffed up"?

#### APPLICATION: HOW MIGHT THIS IMPACT THE WAY I SEE AND LIVE?

1. Have you encountered moments when you wanted to appear "more spiritual"? Why? What were you feeling at that moment? What is the danger in this (v. 18-19; 23)?
2. What specifically helps you sink the roots of your faith in Christ to a deeper more authentic place? Is there a Godly person who encourages you in this? If so, who?

3. What is the value in practicing the "restraint of sensual (bodily, physical) indulgence" (v. 23)? Ask the Lord to bring something to your mind.

#### WRAP UP QUESTION

In your understanding, what is the difference between religion vs. a relationship with Jesus Christ?

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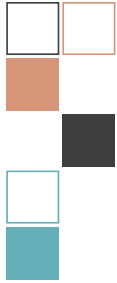
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COLOSSIANS 3:1-11 //  
**NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST**

S T U D Y 5

**ICE-BREAKER**

When you think of the cliché, “out with the old, in with the new,” what is the first thing that comes to mind? Don’t overthink this! (e.g., an old pair of shoes, a phone, etc.)

**SHARING QUESTION**

What is the most recent thing you “set your mind to”?

**OBSERVATION (INDUCTIVE STUDY)**

1. What is meant by “set your heart on the things above”? (3:2)
2. What is the motive for changing our behavior according to verses 1-4 and verse 10?
3. Is it necessary for God to have wrath against evil in order to be just? What do you think God’s justice looks like?
4. In what ways did we once walk (3:5-7)? What should we “put away” (3:8)?
5. What should define your “new self” (3:10)? How can you be renewed?<sup>6</sup>
6. In Paul’s second list, he writes to put away with anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language from your lips and lying (3:8-9). This list represented the direction the Colossians were headed. Which one of these best represents our culture today?
7. (3:11) Barbarians were those who neither spoke Greek nor embraced Greek culture; Scythians were a lower caste of people among the barbarians. Paul wanted Christians of his day to realize there are no divisions in Christ.

Even though we are in Christ, what brings division among us? What are we to do about this?

**APPLICATION: HOW MIGHT THIS IMPACT THE WAY I SEE AND LIVE?**

1. What might it look like for you to “set your mind on the things above” (3:1) this week? Be specific.
2. How does our new identity in Christ change the way we see ourselves?
3. How does our new identity in Christ change our personal behavior?
4. How does our new identity in Christ change the way we treat those different from us?
5. How does today’s culture divide people today? Do you, even subtly, label people creating “us vs. them”?

**WRAP UP QUESTION**

Honestly, how would you characterize your last week: earthly minded or heavenly minded? Why?

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<sup>6</sup>Barry, J. D. (2014). *Colossians: Being Like Jesus* (pp. 83-84). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



COLOSSIANS 3:12-17 // **CLOTHING OURSELVES WITH CHRIST**

**STUDY 6**

**ICE-BREAKER**

What is your favorite “go to” article of clothing? Why?

**SHARING QUESTION**

Looking back, what is one area of your life that has improved or that Christ has helped you improve?

**OBSERVATION (INDUCTIVE STUDY)**

- 1. Why do you think Paul is using the image of clothes? What should we “put on” (3:12)?
- 2. What do you think it means that we are chosen, holy and dearly loved?
- 3. What might it look like to “bear with each other”? What might it look like to “forgive whatever grievances we have against each other”?

- 4. How is love the binding force between all these virtues (3:14)?
- 5. According to Paul, what should rule our hearts (3:15)? What were we called to do? (When Paul refers to “one body,” he is talking about the Church—those who gather in Christ’s name)
- 6. From verses 16-17, how would you summarize Paul’s instructions?
- 7. What does admonish mean in this context? What is the purpose of musical worship? What does it mean to “do and speak in the name of the Lord”?

**APPLICATION: HOW MIGHT THIS IMPACT THE WAY I SEE AND LIVE?**

- 1. How does Christian behavior flow out of our life in Christ? How do you nurture and help this process?
- 2. Letting Christ rule means framing our desires and actions with him in mind. What areas of your public life are not entirely ruled by Christ?<sup>7</sup> What about your private life?
- 3. How can you become better at “bearing with” others and forgiving others (3:13)? Why should you forgive? Is there someone you need to forgive?

**WRAP UP QUESTION**

What is one thing you can ask the group to pray for you specifically as it relates to this study?

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<sup>7</sup>Barry, J. D. (2014). *Colossians: Being Like Jesus* (p. 88). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



## COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1 // MUTUAL SUBMISSION

S T U D Y 7

**Note:** Paul moves from teaching about life at church, to life at home. He has advice for Christian families and workers. He deals with all the “one-another” relationships—between wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters. Context is everything: in Greek society, a wife has a formal and isolated existence. She is in charge of the home, but she herself is one of her husband’s possessions. Meanwhile, he has freedom to find friendship and sexual pleasure elsewhere. The Greek wife has to obey her husband anyway, whether she is a Christian or not.

What Paul is saying is that she may now submit to her husband out of her own Christian freedom. Paul could easily have given Christian wives permission to escape from their pagan marriages.

Instead, he says they are now free to commit themselves to their husbands with love from the Lord.

To husbands, Paul says, “Love your wives.” Instead of treating them coldly and distantly, husbands are to treasure, affirm and care for their wives. This is unheard of in pagan society, where manhood is expressed by harshness, intolerance and brutality. The Christian husband is to be like Christ to his wife, laying down his life for her.<sup>8</sup>

### ICE-BREAKER

Who most recently made you laugh out loud?

### SHARING QUESTION

Share a time where you were a part of a successful team. How did the teammates behave that helped make it successful?

### OBSERVATION (INDUCTIVE STUDY)

1. In Colossians 3:11, Paul speaks of our new identity as “Christ is all, and is in all.” How does this allow us to accept different roles and submit to one another?
2. In this passage, the general principle is mutual submission. What does a wife submitting to her husband have to do with thankfulness? What does a husband loving his wife, and not being harsh, have to do with thankfulness (3:19)?
3. How is the concept of mutual submission a better principle than fighting for one’s rights in terms of relationships?
4. What are children to do? What does this do to their relationship with the Lord?
5. What are fathers not allowed to do? What is the result if they do?
6. How is slavery alive in our culture today?

### APPLICATION: HOW MIGHT THIS IMPACT THE WAY I SEE AND LIVE?

1. What are the main themes from this passage which are to be foundational in your relationships? For you personally, what is a strength and a weakness?
2. Who do we really work for? How does this drive and impact your outlook and attitude? (v. 23)
3. According to v. 25, we are not to show favoritism. Why do you think favoritism is wrong? Have you experienced favoritism or the lack thereof?

### WRAP UP QUESTION

Reflect on your upbringing. How would you characterize your home based on mutual and respectful submission?

<sup>8</sup>Knowles, A. (2001). *The Bible guide* (1st Augsburg books ed., p. 636). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.



# COLOSSIANS 4:2-18 // COMMUNITY OF GOD

## STUDY 8

**Note:** In this final note, Paul singles out three ingredients that should characterize the Colossians' relations and responsibilities towards the non-Christians: prayer (v. 2-4); a lifestyle of discreet behavior and diligent service (v. 5); and winsome and wholesome speech (v. 6).

Clearly, Paul cares greatly about the impression that Christians make on outsiders. He warns the Colossians to be wise—not using their Christian freedom to be rebellious or lazy. They must be both loving and challenging in their conversations with everyone.<sup>9</sup>

### ICE-BREAKER

If you have one day to do anything you wanted, what would you choose to do (don't overthink this!)?

### SHARING QUESTION

What qualities does someone you trust have?

### OBSERVATION (INDUCTIVE STUDY)

1. When it comes to the gospel, what role is played by prayer (v. 2-3)?
2. What do you think Paul means when he writes to be "watchful and thankful"? Why is this important?
3. How does Paul encourage the Colossians to act and speak toward outsiders?
4. Paul mentions many names of those who were all with him at various times (Acts 12:12, 13:5, 19:29, Philemon 24, 2 Tim 4:10). Why do you think Paul would include them in his greetings to the church?

Why is it important for us to name and affirm those who have helped us in the Christian community?

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### APPLICATION: HOW MIGHT THIS IMPACT THE WAY I SEE AND LIVE?

1. How did you first hear the Gospel? When was the last time God opened the doors for you to share the Gospel? Did you share or shy away from this moment? What did you feel at that time?
2. Write down a list of qualities of the men Paul mentioned. Of these, which would you like to be said of you?

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### WRAP UP QUESTION

Looking back on Colossians 2:6-7 and 3:1-2, what can help you move towards a Kingdom-minded direction and lifestyle?

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<sup>9</sup>Knowles, A. (2001). *The Bible guide* (1st Augsburg books ed., p. 637). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.







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