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INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul was a prisoner when he wrote these letters to the early church. They reveal great freedom and joy in spite of adversity. The key for Paul was “life in Christ,” a life of true freedom. For Paul, nothing compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. He yearned for everyone to share his joy.

These Prison Letters contain, much as Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s prison writing generations later do, great insights about the supremacy of Christ, the cost of discipleship and the importance of living together in community. They are filled with thanksgiving. They are laced with prayers that encourage people of all generations to live as visible expressions of God’s grace in the world. They invite today’s readers to “put into practice” much that will lead to true peace and freedom.

The Colossian Christians were on the verge of losing their understanding of the power by which the Christian life is lived. This letter is Paul’s great explanation of the power and joy that God provides for living the Christian life.

LESSON ONE: COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

OPENING QUESTION: *What choice have you recently made based on a reputation?*

Note: The word *apostle* comes from a verb meaning “to send on a mission.” An apostle is one sent on behalf of another with his authority.

1. How did Paul introduce himself to people he had never met and what does this reveal about him?

2. Who was Timothy?

v.1

Acts 16:1-3

2 Timothy 1:2

2 Timothy 1:4-6

3. What was the reputation of the Colossian church for which Paul thanked God? (vv.4-8)

4. What is the gospel? (Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

5. What was the evidence that the gospel was bearing fruit?

6. What was Epaphras' reputation and how did he earn it? (v.7, Colossians 4:12-13)

7. What is your reputation? How does your reputation honor or dishonor God?

8. What prayer request did Paul continue to pray for the believers? (v.9)

9. Why do you think he persisted with this prayer request?

10. What was the God-pleasing life that could result from such prayer? (vv.10-12)

Note: Paul uses the *dominion of darkness* as a metaphor for evil. In Christ there is an exodus from darkness into His light. (Robert Wall)

11. What rescue can you thank God for? (vv.13-14)

12. In what specific situation does God need to strengthen you with power in order for you to have endurance and patience?

13. Write a prayer for another, using the requests of Paul's prayer. (vv.9-12)

Memory Verse: "For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." *Colossians 1:13-14*

Prayer Guide: Christ Jesus, rescue me from darkness.

LESSON TWO: COLOSSIANS 1:15-24

OPENING QUESTION: *What place reminds you that God is creator?*

Note: Imperial images dominated both public and private space in the Roman Empire. Images of Caesar, who was taken to be the *son of god* and head over all, were stamped even on objects of daily use. An exposition of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ radically countered the culture of the day.

1. What allows something to have supremacy and top priority in your life?

What things have that place right now?

2. Read verses 16-20. List the words or phrases describing Jesus that are evidences of His supremacy.
3. In a world where so many words and images grab for your loyalty, why is it important to be reminded of Christ's supremacy? (see also John 20:30-31)

4. How does Christ make God visible?

v.15

John 1:14-18

John 14:9

Philippians 2:6-8

Hebrews 1:3

What difference does it make to have God dwell with you?

5. What is Christ's role in creation?

v.16

John 1:1-4

John 1:10-13

How does this impact your worldview and your care for His creation?

6. What did Paul describe as the cause for alienation from God?
v.21, Colossians 2:13, see also Romans 3:23)

7. What reconciles people to God? (vv.19-23, see also Romans 5:6-11, Ephesians 1:13-14)

8. Reflect on your own life and complete the following statement:

Once I was...

(v.21, see also Colossians 1:12-14)

Now by God's grace I am...

(v.22)

9. What does it mean that Jesus is the "firstborn from among the dead?"
v.18
Acts 26:23
1 Corinthians 15:20-21
Revelation 1:5

10. How do these verses encourage you to "continue in your faith established and firm?"
1 Corinthians 15:58
1 John 2:3-6
1 John 3:18-20, 23-24

11. How do you hold out the hope of your faith to others?

Spend time praying for others using the verses from this lesson.

12. Write out a prayer praising Christ for who He is.

Memory Verse: "He is before all things and in Him all things hold together." *Colossians 1:17*

Prayer Guide: Lord Jesus Christ, reign over me.

LESSON THREE: COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:8, ACTS 20:17-38

OPENING QUESTION: *What person in your life has changed you because they believed in something so deeply?*

Note: there was no deficiency in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Paul suffered affliction because he was preaching the good news of Christ's atonement. (NIV)

1. How did Paul serve Christ and what personal cost was involved for him?

v.25

v.28

v.29

Acts 20:19-35

2. What has your service for Christ cost you and how are you challenged by Paul's example?

3. What does it mean to *struggle for others with Christ's energy*? (v.29, see also Philippians 4:13)

4. Why was Paul so passionate about preaching the truth of Christ?

Colossians 1:28b

Colossians 2:2-3

Acts 20:20-24

5. What deceptions threatened the church? (Colossians 2:4,8; Acts 20:29-31)

Why do they remain a threat today?

LESSON FOUR: COLOSSIANS 2:9-23

OPENING QUESTION: *Was there ever a time when your preoccupation with rules became a problem?*

1. Why do you think people sometimes substitute spiritual practices and a “hyper spirituality” for faith in the living God?

2. What is essential for a living faith? (Colossians 2:6-7, 13-14)

3. What can detour a life of faith?

Isaiah 29:13-16

Matthew 15:6b-9

Galatians 5:1-8

Which of these detours are you tempted to take?

4. What are you “**not**” to let others do to you?

v.8

v.16

v.18

Describe the people who engage in such practices.

Why do they pose a danger?

What is required for you to avoid this danger?

Note: God gave circumcision to the Jewish people in the Old Testament as a sign of His covenant relationship.

5. Read Acts 15:5-11 and Colossians 2:9-12. Why is circumcision not a requirement for the believer?

6. What spiritual detours threatened the church?

vv.11-12

vv.16-17

vv.18-19

vv.20-23 (see also Mark 7:18-20)

Why was each a spiritual dead end?

How do these detours remain a threat to the church today?

7. Read John 15:1-17. What words of Jesus call you back to Him?

What words lead you to a correction of thought or action?

Memory Verse: “You have been given fullness in Christ, who is the Head over every power and authority. *Colossians 2:10*

Prayer Guide: Lord Jesus, give me an undivided heart for You.

LESSON FIVE: COLOSSIANS 3:1-4:1

OPENING QUESTION: *Recall a time when you were inappropriately dressed.*

1. What did Christ do for you that enables you to please Him? (vv.1-15)
2. What does it mean that the life of the believer is *hidden with Christ in God*? (vv.3-4, see also Psalm 91:1-4, Romans 8:38-39, Galatians 2:20)
3. Why might “setting your heart and mind on things above” alter your perspective of earthly things? (see also Colossians 2:17)
4. How do you reset your heart and mind?
v.5a

vv.9-10

v.15

v.16a

Romans 12:1-2

Hebrews 12:1-3
5. What does your checkbook and calendar reveal about where your heart and mind are set?
6. Reflect on the experience of getting dressed for a significant event. How does this help you think about clothing yourself spiritually?

7. What must be taken off in order to shed the old self? (vv.5-9)

What are you tempted to hold on to?

8. Why do you think greed and idolatry are included in Paul's list of sexual sins?

9. What are you to put on? (vv.12-17)

10. How are your spiritual wardrobe choices impacting the community around you?

Note: Colossians 3:18-4:1 shows that Christ is to transform all earthly relationships within the social structures of the day.

11. How did Christ make all believers equal? (v.11)

How are believers seen by God and for what purpose? (v.12, 1 Peter 2:9)

12. How are people to serve one another and why? (3:17-4:1)

13. What verses have most challenged you this week? How do those verses prompt you to change?

Memory Verse: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." *Colossians 3:2*

Prayer Guide: Lord Jesus, draw me closer.

LESSON SIX: COLOSSIANS 4:2-18

OPENING QUESTION: *Recall a time when a letter of encouragement arrived when you really needed it*

1. Why does Paul feel a special need for prayer at this time?

Why do you think he asks new Christians at Colossae for such prayer?

2. How does Paul instruct people to pray?

3. What does *watchful* prayer help avoid and how can you pray like this?
(see also Micah 7:7, Luke 22:39-46)

4. What have you learned about prayer from Paul? (vv.2-4, 12, see also Ephesians 3:14-21, Colossians 1:9-12)

How might your prayer life be stretched or changed by his example?

5. What practices does Paul encourage in order to draw outsiders to Christ?

vv.3-4

v.5a

v.5b

v.6

How might you use each of these practices to draw others to Christ?

6. Who was Tychicus and why was he being sent? (v.7-8, see also Ephesians 6:21-22)

7. Read Philemon vv.8-16 and Colossians 3:11. What set Onesimus apart and made him an example of all that was new in Christ?

8. Why do you think Paul once again commended Epaphras, the church founder, so strongly? (vv.12-13, see also Colossians 1:7, Philemon 23)

What is the benefit today of commending such people in the church and who might you commend?

9. How do you remember the “chains” of those who are persecuted for serving Christ today?

10. What has this passage taught you about Christian community and how has it caused you to rethink your involvement in it? (vv.7-18)

Memory Verse: Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” *Colossians 4:2*

Prayer Guide: Almighty God, help me to “wrestle” in prayer.

COLOSSIANS REVIEW LESSON

1. Which verses from this study would you like to remember?
2. What have you learned about the *supremacy* of Christ?
3. What have you learned about the *sufficiency* of Christ?
4. Are there any new practices you have embraced to guard against lies and help you live in the truth?
5. Are there any lifestyle changes you have made in order to live as God's "beloved?"
6. How has your prayer life been stretched and what answers to prayer can you thank God for?
7. How have you been challenged to rethink your involvement in Christian community?