

THE
Mighty
&
THE
Mysterious

A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

by HEIDI GOEHMANN



Founded in 1869 as the publishing arm of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Concordia Publishing House gives all glory to God for the blessing of 150 years of opportunities to provide resources that are faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Published by Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • cph.org

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To the Church on earth:
You are a wild, messy, worthwhile, beautiful, complicated,
encouraging, frustrating, mighty, mysterious gift.

I love you.
I can't deal with you.
I was made for you.
You bring me heartache.
You give me joy.
You are His and that is enough.

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Introduction

This last year, our family took a trip to Winnipeg in Manitoba, Canada.

We haphazardly chose this destination because it was within a day's drive of our house, held the opportunity to see some hockey, and had economical hotel options in the city center. As a bonus, it was international and we all had our passports. When the time came for our trip, we packed the van to the brim with a bin of ice skates and a duffel bag bulging with extra mittens, hats, scarves, and long underwear; grabbed our bag of audiobooks from the library; and put pedal to the metal to jet out of town.

It was a long drive, but as soon as we crossed the border, I kid you not the air became sweeter—not because Canadians have cleaner air, but because my children stopped bickering and busied themselves instead with gawking out the windows to see what looked different in Manitoba compared with our native Nebraskaland. Once we arrived in Winnipeg itself, our children started to holler out the fun and festive landmarks:

“Ooooo! There’s a giant Canadian flag.”

“Ohhh! That’s the capital building!”

“They have Korean food here!”

“Look, there’s the art museum!”

“It’s so metropolitan!”

But then we got out of our car . . . and were greeted by *The Slush*.

I can’t even begin to describe the level of slush in this city. We trudged and we trekked through miles of it as we explored and adventured. We had forgotten our winter boots, and every time you heard someone yell, “Oh man!” you knew it meant he or she had been trying to sidestep a puddle and the puddle had won.

On that first day of adventuring, finding ourselves at the place between shivering uncontrollably and the beginning stages of frostnip, we rounded a corner to see a park full of people chatting, laughing, and skating as sunshine streamed on them from the March sky. We all stood speechless for a moment, taking it in.

In the city of Winnipeg, where the Red and Assiniboine Rivers meet, you can skate the Red River Mutual Trail, one of the longest naturally occurring frozen skating paths in the world. Part of this trail is surrounded by city buildings, overpasses, and pedestrian bridges. Still more is surrounded by overhanging trees, wide open fields of snow, and the biggest slice of sky you

can imagine. There is also a sense of stunning community along the trail. The city comes alive with hockey rinks, warming huts, and benches all along the path. There are people skating with dogs, toddlers in strollers, young couples on first dates, and families all around, any time of day.

Our skates strapped on, we joined in the community, discovering the frozen wonderland. After an hour, I was stiff, a little tired, but a lot amazed. I looked around me—

God created all of this?

He created the river that flowed four inches below my feet. He created the bright sunshine that warmed my face. He created snow that blinded my eyes with its whiteness. He created not just water, but He cleverly created ice as well. He created, and then He created some more.

He created the laughter of my daughter as she zipped ahead of me and urged me to go faster. He created the arms of the dad supporting plump little feet learning to skate. He created friendship and the sweat of middle school boys running off the incessant energy that comes with growing. He created the fire that warms and the community that grows around it.

There is a God who creates—making life, heartbeats, a world to discover, and all the pieces in it. And then He knits and knits and knits. Each day He is making afghans of connection and community. They warm us and points us right back to the beginning—to our Father, to His Son, and to His Spirit, who are weaving plans and purposes into this whole big blanket we call life.

As I stood on the Red River Mutual Trail, the big, bold, beautiful realization of what God has created and what He continues to create amazed me. But the realization that He is intimately connected to His creation and that He intricately connects His creation left me reverberating with shock. And it led me to the Book of Colossians.

Colossians gives us a vantage point to see this deep connection between our Savior and His people, between our Savior and everything He has created across time and places and spaces.

Jesus was there in the beginning of all this creating, and He's still working now. He is the great connector. He connects every piece, one to another. In the day to day of life, many times we see the slush rather than the clear, smooth, beautiful surface of the Red River Mutual Trail. The slush makes life confusing. One minute we're experiencing car games and a fun time, the next our feet are ankle deep in a dark blob of cold, wet questions without answers. We try to sidestep these questions, but there's a crowd of pedestrians and a street full of traffic and sometimes our only option is to walk through the slush and murkiness. The slush can make it difficult to see Jesus working in our lives, the connections He is making all around us and the redemption He is bringing to our moments and our relationships.

Colossians reminds us that God is mighty, even in the midst of our slush. He is also mysterious. He doesn't always clean up the slush, the questions. But He does walk us through it. Those questions, if we let them, will connect us deeper to Him and to one another. That connection is joy and peace in our lives, even when we can't see the path He is making.

He is marvelous, majestic, merciful, and always meaningful.

Jesus Christ is Creator and Connector. He is the mighty and the mysterious.

Heidi


How to Use This Study

We often make God too small or too large. Colossians teaches us that God is big and mighty but also that, in Christ and through the Spirit, God is accessible to us. Colossians teaches us that God knits us together with the whole Body of Christ and that, through His Word, He reveals to us what we need to know to be in true relationship with Him and with one another. All of this is mighty, and it is mysterious.

Because we all are in different seasons and places in our walk with this mighty and mysterious God, this Bible study is designed to meet you where you are, with lots of options for accountability with flexibility:

Option 1—Each week, there are five days of study included in this workbook. Maybe you are giddy with excitement to dig in to all of this, or maybe it is intimidating as you page through. In Christ, it's all about grace—so you decide how you'd like to proceed through this workbook. There is no one right way. I want to encourage you to be in the Word on a daily basis, but that can look different depending on your stage or season of life. Each “day” in this workbook should take about thirty minutes to complete. Some people like to sit down and do more than one day at a time. Others like to schedule a set time each day as study time. Still others spend time focusing on two questions in a day's study, and then they set it aside and come back to the rest of the day's study on the following day. You can commit to completing one of the study days each week or two, three, four, or all five of the days. Remember, this is grace-based. Some weeks in life are busier than others. So do what you can. God will speak through His Word, no matter how much of this workbook you are able to read and complete.

Option 2—Watch the video segment connected with each week of study, whether as an individual or with a study group. Video downloads can be found at cph.org/mightymysterious. You can use the workbook without the videos and not feel like you're missing huge chunks. But the videos offer another opportunity for you to learn and for a group to learn and discuss Colossians together. The videos make it easier for you to lead a study group, if you want to study with others. If all you can commit to in this season of life is watching the videos with a group or on your own, and skipping over the rest of the workbook, the Word is still at work! You will not feel behind in the study if you do not watch the videos, but you will miss some really great content, if I do say so myself!



Option 3—This workbook includes fun facts, bonus articles, white space for journaling and prayer requests, Bible verses to contemplate and memorize, and artwork to meditate on. Be creative with it. Share a picture or post on social media of what you're learning or enjoying in this study. Consider what parts of this study would be a message of hope that you could share in someone else's day. Frame the art on your fridge or wall. Write out Bible verses you like and put them in places you'll see them often to remind you of your redemption in Christ. The sky is the limit!


My one recommendation is, if at all possible, to *gather* with others for this study—whether in person, over the phone, online, via video chat, or via text messages. The Book of Colossians will make you hungry for real, genuine community. There are times when it is very valuable and helpful to study God's Word alone with our Savior by the Holy Spirit. But as we will learn in our study, God intended us to do life *together* in Christ. Our lives can feel very isolating at times. I don't want you to find yourself massively lonely as you study Colossians, where you'll discover God's wondrous work of connecting us with one another in the Body of Christ. Having a friend or a group to share and discuss with as we study God's Word reminds us that we are part of the Church, and that the Church on earth has a purpose: we are meant to suffer together and to rejoice together and to show Jesus to one another. Let's start today.

Suggestions for Facilitating This Study in a Group

You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses doing this study alongside you! Think about all of the groups around the country (and even the world) holding this same book, walking through God's Word together. Isn't that cool?! That doesn't mean, though, that every study group will look the same.

Here are some ideas as you consider how to facilitate your group. These come from other facilitators who found that these strategies helped their group dig into God's Word and often led to fruitful, open conversation together:

- Cultivate an environment of grace. Let participants know there are rarely right or wrong answers in this study. Instead, help them understand that the goal of this study is questions and open discussion around the Word. We all are trying to figure out life and faith. Being together in God's Word is the best place to wrestle with questions we all have about faith, people, heartache, and life-size and everyday challenges. Invite kind and loving disagreement between study members. Not everyone will agree with the author or with one another at all times. Help people frame their thoughts within an environment of safety and grace, recognizing that the multiple perspectives people bring to a small group is a powerful gift. Allow the group to have mild tangents in discussion and reflection. Members of the group need time to get to know one another in order to be able to grow together and start to do life together.
- Ask the question, "What did you find interesting in this week's study?" to start the discussion when your group gathers. It's always fun to see what stuck out to other people during their alone study time.
- As you do your own alone study time for the days in the workbook, put an asterisk or other mark next to the study segments or questions you find most interesting. Bring these up the next time your group gathers, to help spark discussion. If you found it interesting, chances are someone else will too!
- When I facilitate groups with video studies, I structure our time like this: take prayer requests, have prayer time, discuss the previous week's study work, then watch the video and discuss the video. But *any* order works. Whatever works for your group is the right way for your group. It's also okay to go at a slower pace, doing one week of study over a month's time, or whatever sounds best to your group.

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- During your group discussion, spend time studying at least two or three of the Bible verses from the previous week's study days. Some participants may not be able to spend much time in the Word outside of your group meeting time. So give them the chance to meditate on God's Word by doing so as a group during some of your meeting time. Even if someone has already focused on those verses during the week, it never hurts to return to the same Scripture verses multiple times. God opens our eyes to new insights every time.
 - There will likely be questions that you or others leave blank during the course of the study. Some questions speak to certain people more than others. Perhaps consider challenging one another to answer the questions that are most *uncomfortable* first. But know that it is also very normal and okay to skip questions sometimes as well.
 - Pay attention to the extras each week and the boxes in the margin, particularly if you are looking for an "answer" or for more information on the text or a certain idea.
 - Appoint a "scribe" who takes really great notes during the video. This way if someone misses a point or a fill-in, they won't need to feel stressed out during the video. And the scribe's video notes can be a helpful resource during your group's discussion of the video.
 - Ask a youngin' in your group to help with the technology if you hit a road-block. We have many different gifts in the church. You might be shocked at how crazy knowledgeable young people are about technology things. And there's no reason to repeatedly want to throw your computer out of the window. ☺

Repeat this to yourself, "There is no one *right way* to do Bible study." The only *right way* is to gather around the inerrant Word of God and to keep searching for His truth and love with the help of His Spirit and with Jesus, our Savior, as our foundation.

Happy studying, friends!

Asia Minor



In Paul's Letter to the Colossians, he also mentions the cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. There was a trio of churches between Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, within fifteen miles of one another. Though Paul had never visited any of those churches before he wrote his Letter to the Colossians, these three churches were all fruits of the church Paul planted in Ephesus.

Useful Terms

asceticism—the harsh discipline of the body for religious reasons, such as the avoidance of foods, beating the body, or other ways to deny the flesh in order to prove rejection of the things of the world and prioritization of the things of God. Asceticism is often also coupled with false humility.

Body of Christ—a uniquely descriptive and biblical phrase for the Church. This phrase refers to the people of God, knit together by His Spirit, with Jesus Christ as the head of the Body. Through this image, God gives us a picture of how the Church grows—intimately connected to the head, Jesus—and how it functions as a united Body made up of a diverse group of members. Jesus is the intimate connection and connector of all of us who are in the Church.

Christology—the study of the person, characteristics, work, and nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus is both fully God and fully a man, who walked on the earth and suffered and died for our sake.

community—a group of people living life together, whether because of close proximity, mutual interests, or other common bonds. In this book, I reserve the word *community* for the goal and process of genuine life together, rather than a vague idea of locality or grouping. Genuine community is living life together in

authenticity—where accountability and individual gifts are valued, but also where mistakes, forgiveness, and grace are understood as necessary. In genuine life together, growth is valued over perfection. This meaning of *community* is the goal, however imperfect our experience of it might be.

cosmology—the study of the beginning, or the origin, of the universe and all that is in it—including plants, continents, constellations, oceans, and people.

Epistle—a fancy word for “letter”; a handwritten note used to communicate information and thoughts.

eschatology—the study of the end times; particularly, the study of how God will resolve the brokenness of the world and will usher in the new creation when Jesus returns.

evolution—the belief that all that exists developed and diversified over time through a very slow process of simpler microorganisms and cells becoming more complex beings.

flesh—the whole physical being of a person; it refers specifically to the meaty parts of human beings, what exists between skin and bones.

gnostic(s)—those who follow the teachings of Gnosticism, such as the belief that Jesus was a single representation of the divine and that humans need special knowledge to

release the divine within themselves as well. Gnosticism teaches that all material, physical things are evil, while spiritual things are good.

heresy—a teaching, belief, theory, or opinion that is contrary to what Scripture teaches. A broad definition of *heresy* can be any teachings, beliefs, theories, or opinions that are against an established custom or religious belief. But for the purposes of our study, we will use the narrower definition of *heresy* as anything that is contrary to the teachings in the Bible.

preeminence—that which is supreme, having inarguable leadership, authority, and superiority; that which completely surpasses all other things. Jesus' preeminence means that He is Lord and Master of the universe and of our hearts and lives.

spirit—the parts of human beings that are not our flesh—what is not physical, such as our personality, our soul, our emotions, and our character.

the Colossian heresy—a collection of false teachings among the Christians in Colossae. Some of these teachings included the need to worship a pantheon of spirits in addition to worshiping Jesus; restrictions or requirements concerning rituals, feast days, and special celebrations; and the need to obtain higher, special knowledge about God beyond the

Gospel of Jesus in order to become closer to God.

vocation—a calling, professionally, personally, or in family life. People have many vocations: daughter, brother, husband, mother, teacher, neighbor, friend, business manager, barista, and so forth. These vocations are not our identity but rather areas of life in which we serve and are able to give glory to God. Vocations can change with seasons of life. Our identity never changes: we are children of God, redeemed by Christ Jesus.

worldview—a lens by which we see the world around us, including our experiences, our relationships, and our communities. Our worldview also determines how we understand all the good, the bad, and the ugly of the world.







Week 1

ALL THAT IS MIGHTY

Viewer Guide

VERSES TO BOOKMARK

Colossians 4:7–17

WORLDVIEW

A lens by which we see the world around us, including our experiences, our relationships, and our communities. Our worldview also determines how we understand all the good, the bad, and the ugly of the world.

BODY OF CHRIST

A uniquely descriptive and biblical phrase for the Church. This phrase refers to the people of God, knit together by His Spirit, with Jesus Christ as the Head of the Body. Through this image, God gives us a picture of how the Church grows—intimately connected to the Head, Jesus—and how it functions as a united Body made up of a diverse group of members. Jesus is the intimate connection and connector of all of us who are in the Church.

COSMOLOGY

The study of the beginning, or the origin, of the universe and all that is in it—including plants, continents, constellations, oceans, and people.

CHRISTOLOGY

The study of the person, characteristics, work, and nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus is both fully God and fully a man, who walked on the earth and suffered and died for our sake.

VIDEO 1: WHAT'S UP WITH WORLDVIEW?— AN OVERVIEW OF COLOSSIANS COLOSSIANS 1:1–14

THE VALUE OF WORLDVIEW

If our worldview isn't grounded in Scripture, we end up making things _____ when they aren't _____.

POSSIBLE PLANKS IN THE RAFT OF OUR WORLDVIEW*

- Plank—Who am I and where did I come from?
- Plank—Do I have a purpose?
- Plank—What does a healthy family look like?
- Plank—Where do things and people get their value from?

THE VALUE OF COLOSSIANS

- The Colossians _____, just like us.
- The Colossians _____ in faith, just like us.

FOUNDATION OF OUR WORLDVIEW, ACCORDING TO COLOSSIANS

- Jesus is all we need for salvation.
- God's Word is all we need for understanding.
- We are not alone on this pilgrimage. Jesus goes before us, and the Body

* The idea of describing our worldview as a raft made up of planks comes from Richard Bewes, "Could You Describe Your Worldview?" Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, January 29, 2016, <https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/february-2016/could-you-describe-your-worldview/>.

of Christ—the Church—is all around us.

THE VALUE OF QUESTIONS

- The Colossians _____, just like us.

THE VALUE OF PEOPLE

- The Colossians wrestled _____, just like us.

SEE COLOSSIANS 4:7–17.

- The Colossians wrestled with what it means to be the _____, just like us.

This Letter to the Colossians grounds us as individuals in a _____-centric, _____-guided, _____-driven worldview. This Letter to the Colossians also grounds the Church in a _____-centric, _____-guided, _____-driven worldview.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Take time to consider the planks in your raft—your worldview—today. How would you answer each of the questions I suggested as planks?
2. What are some of the factors that have influenced the planks of your worldview? Perhaps something you’ve been taught, something you’ve experienced, or relationships you’ve had?
3. Read the first chapter of Colossians and identify anything you hear that addresses these issues:

Cosmology

Christology

Sufficiency of Christ

Supremacy of Christ

SUFFICIENCY

Questions of what is “enough.”

SUPREMACY

Questions of who is in charge in the universe.

COLOSSIANS 1:7–8

“Just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.”

A SPECIAL VERSION OF CHRISTIANITY?

The advanced, special Christianity that the false teachers claimed to have versus the Christianity the apostles of Jesus handed down continued to be an issue in the Early Church, even after Paul wrote to the Colossians. In fact, during the second century AD, the false teaching confronting the Colossians developed into what we know as Gnosticism.

GNOSTIC(S)

Those who follow the teachings of Gnosticism, such as the belief that Jesus was a single representation of the divine and that humans need special knowledge to release the divine within themselves as well. Gnosticism teaches that all material, physical things are evil, while spiritual things are good.

Day 1

THE FAITHFUL AND THE FAITHFUL LEADERS COLOSSIANS 1:1–8

If I walk due east from my house, the street dead-ends into our neighborhood grocery store. During the summer months in particular, it is a favorite adventure of ours to take hiking backpacks and a wagon to procure groceries for the week. There's a strong possibility we look a bit weird, but our neighbors kindly wave and always ask after our dogs. It's the smallest small talk you can have, but it's still an encounter with our neighbors. Every time we make the grocery trek, I feel more connected and less random. I am a part of this town, this state, this place, in this giant hulking globe.

Whom do you live life connected to?

We all have family and friends we would identify as some of our close relationships. Consider the vaguer connections we have in life—the neighbor down the street, the grocery store checker, someone we go to school with, someone in the pick-up line at our children's school, or the friend of a friend who comments on our social media post. These vaguer connections are similar to what the apostle Paul had with the Colossians.

EPAPHRAS

“Just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant” (Colossians 1:7).

Epaphras was a pastor. He might have been the founder of the Christian congregation of Jews and Greeks in the city of Colossae in the region of Asia Minor.

Open your Bible to Colossians 1:1–8 and note the people who are connected to this letter, whether specifically named or vaguely mentioned.

The Colossians were friends of a friend. So why did Paul invest so much in them? Why did he send a whole letter to care for and teach and love them?

The Colossians had most likely never met Paul, but they shared an important thread of connection with Paul. It's time for some detective work. Are you ready? Colossians 1 gives us little clues about this connecting thread.

LOCATION OF COLOSSAE

See page 000 for a map of Asia Minor in Paul's day

Look closely at Colossians 1:2–4. What words or phrases are repeated in both Colossians 1:2 and Colossians 1:4?

The Holy Spirit doesn't waste a word in Holy Scripture. What may seem like repetition in a simple word of greeting is actually a teaching moment from Paul's Spirit-driven pen. Let's look at each of the words Paul repeats and consider how they are more than a fancy way of saying, "Hi." Instead, these words show Paul's understanding of community.

COMMUNITY

A group of people living life together, whether because of close proximity, mutual interests, or other common bonds. In this book, I reserve the word *community* for the goal and process of genuine life together, rather than a vague idea of locality or grouping. Genuine community is living life together in authenticity—where accountability and individual gifts are valued, but also where mistakes, forgiveness, and grace are understood as necessary. In genuine life together, growth is valued over perfection. This meaning of *community* is the goal, however imperfect our experience of it might be.

IN CHRIST

The phrase "in Christ" occurs frequently in Paul's writing across the New Testament. Paul actually coined the phrase. Commentators and theologians differ on exactly how many times it appears in Paul's letters, but they agree that it is central to his writings. One commentator suggests there are as many as 170 occurrences of "in Christ" in Paul's letters. Though the Greek phrase is translated a few different ways in our English Bibles, it is still clear that Paul used the phrase "in Christ" numerous times so that the concept would stand out to the many audiences of his Epistles.

Tiny prepositions are easy to overlook, but they can be powerful. With this little phrase, Paul captures our relationship with Christ as an ongoing relationship. At the moment of our Baptism, we are placed "in Christ," and we receive His righteousness. The righteousness we have at the beginning of our relationship with Christ continues to be ours in this moment and in tomorrow's moments too. When God looks on us, He sees us "in Christ" and therefore our judgment from God is righteousness and holiness, rather than sin and separation. The most important thing that could be true of us is that we are "in Christ." It's so important, Paul makes a point to start his letter by describing the Colossians as those who are "in Christ." Praise God, because this is true for us as well! "In Christ" is our very identity.

This little phrase also reminds us that our God wants to spend time with us, just as we are, and can spend time with us, just as we are, because Christ's redemptive work is *in* us, not only placed on us, or done for us. Regularly we get to meet with Him, hear His Word, and sit at His table because we are "in Christ." "In Christ" reflects the protection and ongoing care God pours out on His people—including the Colossian believers and us.

EPISTLE

A fancy word for "letter"; a handwritten note used to communicate information and thoughts.

What do you think the significance of being "in Christ" is, as opposed to being by, on, with, or through Christ?

“In Christ” makes the two other connecting terms in Colossians 1:2 and 1:4 possible.

FAITH/FAITHFUL

SEEING THE MYSTERY

In 1 Timothy 3:9, Paul specifically calls faith a mystery.

Faith is the connecting glue of God’s people. The words *faith* and *faithful* are related. We receive faith as a gift at the moment of our Baptism, and then, as we live the rest of our lives in that Baptism, we are full of faith, or *faithful*. It’s a mighty, mysterious, and wonderful thing. Paul, Timothy, and the Colossians have a shared life because they share the same faith, the same grounding perspective. The connection of the life they share in faith gives Paul and Timothy credibility with the Colossians and gives validity to their writing and care for the Colossians.

PSALM 56:8

“You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?”

Faith in God changes everything in a believer’s life. It changed everything for the Colossians and it changes everything for us. Faith is abstract, but it affects our lives physically, mentally, and emotionally every day. We can be going about our business unaware of God’s presence and action. Then we hear an encouraging Word at just the right time. When we are sad, we are comforted with the promise that God collects our tears. Our family relationships, our friendships, and all our relationships with others can be imperfect and frustrating at times, but faith helps us realize that they are not accidental. God is working His connecting purpose into them, and by faith, we see glimpses of that.

Because faith is abstract, it can also be confusing. Part of the purpose of the Letter to the Colossians was to give that group of believers long ago a stronger grounding in their faith. I don’t know about you, but I need firmer grounding in my faith every day! The slush of life can be confusing, and I need help applying the abstract truths and realities of our faith to my concrete situations.

Let’s take a moment to connect abstract faith to everyday life. For each of the following Bible verses, identify a characteristic of faith described in the passage, and then brainstorm how that characteristic impacts our day-to-day lives.

	Attributes	Impact
Hebrews 11:1		
Romans 10:17		
1 Thessalonians 1:2–3		
1 John 5:4		

SAINTS/BROTHERS

The other word repeated in Colossians 1:2 and 1:4 is *saints*. *Saints* sounds like a fancy-dancy church word. But there's a reason Paul calls those in Colossae *brothers* as well as *saints* in Colossians 1:2. In Christ, the words *brothers* and *saints* are connected. They actually create connection between us when we speak them to one another. They show that God works in families; but His definition of family is much wider than our own.

According to Luke 8:21, whom does Jesus count as brothers?

You are in God's family as a hearer of His Word and disciple of His grace.

Relationships between family members aren't easily cut off. Even when family members are estranged, they are still oddly and mysteriously connected. We can't fully shake our connections with those we're related to, even if we want to. So it is within the Body of Christ. By using the word *brothers*, Paul and Timothy lay groundwork for the Colossians to see themselves as being closely connected to Paul and Timothy, even though they have never met one another.

In the category of weird but true, sainthood is not too far removed from the concept of family. We might think of Mother Teresa when we hear the word *saint*, or maybe we think of St. Paul or St. Timothy. But the Greek word for *saints* in Colossians 1:2, *hagiois*, is simply associated with being set apart or holy. Saints are those who are linked to the nature of Christ instead of the nature of the world. Because we are in Christ, when God looks at us, He sees even our messiness through a Jesus lens. He sees our story whole and complete in Jesus. He sees us as saints. This status connects us to Him in a way that is not true of nonbelievers. Sainthood (and brotherhood, for that matter) isn't about how special we are. It's about the gift of God, connecting us to Himself.

Reread Colossians 1:1. What does Paul say about Timothy in this verse?

Even the authorship of the Letter to the Colossians gives a nod to the ways God mysteriously and mightily connects us. Paul notes a coauthor in many of his epistles, though not all of them. In many cases, this coauthor is Timothy. If you are curious, look up the introduction to each Pauline Epistle, listed in the sidebar. Some commentators say Timothy is often listed as a coauthor because Paul needed a scribe to assist him. However, there may be more to Timothy's role in writing these New Testament Epistles alongside Paul. We call this an open question, which means we aren't sure of the an-

BODY OF CHRIST

A uniquely descriptive and biblical phrase for the Church. This phrase refers to the people of God, knit together by His Spirit, with Jesus Christ as the head of the Body. Through this image, God gives us a picture of how the Church grows—intimately connected to the head, Jesus—and how it functions as a united Body made up of a diverse group of members. Jesus is the intimate connection and connector of all of us who are in the Church.

ἀδελφοίς

adelphois: brothers, or brothers and sisters.

This term can be used for blood relatives, such as siblings, as well as other close, though not biological, relationships. Can you hear the closeness implied by speaking of friends as if they had come from the same womb, as siblings do?

COAUTHORS IN PAUL'S EPISTLES

Find the coauthors of the Pauline Epistles mentioned in these verses:

1 Corinthians 1:1

Galatians 1:1–2

Philippians 1:1

2 Corinthians 1:1

1 Thessalonians 1:1

2 Thessalonians 1:1

Philemon 1

swer. It's important that we are honest when we don't know something for sure, especially when studying the Bible. Maybe Timothy is mentioned at the beginning of Colossians because Paul had a mentor relationship with this young pastor; maybe Timothy had special insight into the Colossian crew in particular. What exactly Timothy did or did not do in writing Colossians is something we probably won't know till we see our Savior face-to-face. But I tend to wonder if Paul purposefully mentioned Timothy and wrote as "we" instead of "I" to bring the "we" of faith to the Colossian believers' attention. This concept of "we" continues to be one of the hardest parts of faith for us to wrap our heads around.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

God sends leaders for our benefit. For example, God chose Moses to be the leader of the Israelites as God brought them out of Egypt and to the Promised Land (see Exodus 4). Can you imagine the Israelites leaving Egypt and making it through forty years in the wilderness without a leader who pointed them to God's faithfulness over and over again?

When our leaders are imperfect, it can be difficult for us to remember that God is the one who put them in their position of leadership—and that He did so for our good. By nature, we prefer the *I* of our own ideas instead of the *we* of community. Faithful leaders point us to God's Word, to God's gifts, and to one another, working to the best of their ability for the best interest of the whole community. Faithful leaders will fail at times. But that doesn't mean we don't need leaders in the Church, nor does it mean God made a mistake in choosing our leaders. Instead, at those times, it's our turn to point our leaders to God's faithfulness and His grace and forgiveness.

THE *WE* OF COMMUNITY

These opening words to the Colossians are steeped in connection and community in more ways than I can count!


Read Colossians 1:3–4 again below and circle every *we* you can find.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.

We thank. We pray. We heard. Again, small words make a big difference. The *we*'s in these verses are also the *we*'s of leadership. Paul has authority as an "apostle of Christ Jesus" and "by the will of God" (1:1). However, what makes the authority really stick is the relationship between the people involved. Connection in Christ and the community He creates bind Paul and God, bind Paul and Timothy, bind the Colossians together, and bind Paul and Timothy and the Colossians to one another. It is only where there is community that people can hear and take to heart admonitions and exhortations like those God gave through Paul to the Colossians in the rest of this letter.

CONNECTION + AUTHORITY = LEADERSHIP

People have a hard time listening to leaders because we're all sinners—both the leaders and the hearers. Leaders are broken people trying to help other broken people. If the equation for leadership doesn't include connection, there is only authority; and people will only listen for so long to someone who has authority over them but no connection to them. Without authority, there is only connection in the equation, and the result is confusion about who to listen to. Then we end up where the Colossians ended up, listening to the wisdom of people who are leading away from the Gospel, listening to demands for special knowledge or ideas God never invented. Very early in the opening of his letter, Paul not only reminds the Colossians of his connection



to and authority toward them, but he also points the Colossians to another leader who embodies the whole equation, who has a personal connection with them and authority: Epaphras.

What designations does Paul give Epaphras in Colossians 1:7–8?

Whom do you consider to be a faithful leader in the Christian Church at large? How do they connect to the people of local churches?

Whom do you consider to be a faithful leader in your local church? How do they connect to you and other people?

We as faithful (faith-filled) people need faithful (faith-filled) leaders. And we need to listen to, converse with, and question these faithful leaders in genuine relationships, connected in genuine community. We are a messy bunch of believers in the Body of Christ. You'll find out throughout our study that the Colossians were also a messy bunch of believers in the Body of Christ. But God is faithful—always—even when we are not. And He lovingly raises up all around us faithful, while imperfect, leaders. Leadership, authority, and connection are all complicated. But the gift of being connected to one another makes the complications worth the trouble.

We are connected closer than we know by a Savior who has all authority over our lives and our hearts. He holds us close to Himself and one another in mighty faith, mighty hope, and mighty love.

CONNECTED BY HIS WORD

Use the Scripture memory verse for the week and the prayer prompt to bring your confession, thanksgiving, praise, and requests before our mighty and mysterious God.

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints. (Colossians 1:4)

PRAYER PROMPT

Lord, You are faithful when people—including me—are not. Guide Your people to reflect Your faithfulness today . . .

WHEN YOU PRAY . . .

If you're not sure what to pray, here is a potential outline for your prayers. But this is your prayer time, so feel free to think outside of these categories—use some, don't use others, and add whatever you like.

Confession—Presenting our guilt before God: broadly, that we are sinners, or narrowly, by admitting and presenting specific sins for Him to heal and forgive.

Thanksgiving—Offering our gratitude before God, through the Holy Spirit, for all that He has done for us and gives to us.

Praise—Recognizing God for who He is, such as Creator, Redeemer, Restorer, Defender, and so forth.

Requests—Sharing with God what needs you have, asking for help, seeking guidance, recognizing His hand in your life and in the lives of those around you.



Day 2

FRUITFUL TREES AND CHURCH PLANTING **COLOSSIANS 1:3–8**

When my husband and I were in college, we each had to write a paper about a church community who had made a difference in our lives. The thing I remember most about this assignment was that the congregation my husband wrote about was only about fourteen years old! I had never considered that churches begin as fresh young things . . . just as adults start as tiny babies. In my young adult mind, I thought congregations had always been around, as if created out of nothing or grown in the Garden of Eden or something. But in reality, there was once a day when each church on this earth didn't exist, and then a few someones, by their sweat and tears, created a living, breathing congregation.

What do you imagine the beginnings of a church look like? What kinds of things go into the start of a church community?

What faith beginnings have you been part of? (E.g., Baptism, moving and finding a new church, becoming involved with a new Christian organization)

God *can* do the work of His kingdom out of thin air and burning bushes, but He almost always chooses to do His work through people—people like Paul, Timothy, Epaphras, the Colossians, you, and me. I now know that just as people are planted in a certain time and place for God's work, so also churches are planted by God in particular times and places.

We often call the work of God *fruit* (like “fruit of the Spirit,” Galatians 5:22). Fruit and planting are closely related.

Open your Bible to Colossians 1:1–8 and note any language connected to fruit and planting in the passage:

ISAIAH 55:10–11

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

These verses show that the Gospel has power: when it is heard, it produces fruit. God promises elsewhere that His Word does not go out and come back to Him void and empty. This means we are free to stop looking at our lives, trying so hard to see fruit; instead, God invites us to place our focus where He promises to give fruit: His Word.

Look at Colossians 1:5–6 specifically and fill in the blanks below:

Of this you have heard before in the _____, the gospel, which has _____, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does _____, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

THE WORD OF TRUTH . . . COME TO YOU


God puts His Spirit into us when we are baptized and He sends us out into this world. Each of our testimonies of how He brought us to Himself looks different, but His faithfulness in finding us, coming to us, is the same. Paul, Timothy, and Epaphras each had their own stories that witnessed to how God’s Word came to them and bore fruit. Their stories are each encouraging in different ways.

What uniqueness do you see in each of these men’s lives? How did God bring His Spirit and Word to each of them? What fruit do you see mentioned in these passages?

Paul—Acts 9:1–19

Timothy—2 Timothy 1:1–7

Epaphras—Colossians 1:6–8



We don't know very much about Epaphras, do we? He is mentioned again later in Colossians and in Philemon 23. We'll talk about his story more in week 6 of our study. For now, it's enough to know that Epaphras was the connecting piece between Paul and the Colossians. Commentators suggest perhaps Epaphras came to Paul in prison, asking for help because the Church in Colossae was struggling. Paul and Timothy then wrote this Letter to the Colossians to address some of Epaphras's concerns and to support him as he cared for the Colossian Church community. Though Epaphras seems to have been a prominent leader in Colossae, he wasn't alone. God placed people in his life who could help him, and he was willing to ask for help when troubles in Colossae began.

Paul and Timothy also needed and had help from other Christians. Paul had Ananias; Timothy had Lois and Eunice. We need one another too. God faithfully places people in our lives who can support us when trouble comes. We are not alone. So much fruit can come from working together and asking for help!

Our stories of God's Word coming to us and finding us are touched again and again by people. How did God initially bring His Word into your life? Who were the people He used to share it with you?

Whom has God used to help and guide you when you most needed it?

THE WORD OF TRUTH . . . AMONG YOU

Paul says the Word of truth is bearing fruit and increasing in the whole world and among the Colossians. But as we already know, that did not mean the Colossians did not have their share of problems. Sometimes we see more evidence of our weakness than evidence that God's Word is bearing fruit in us and among us. Yet Paul does not seem discouraged or dissuaded by the weakness he knows exists among the Colossians. Instead, Paul knew that God promises to do His work even in spite of our weakness—and in fact that God does His best work in the midst of our weakness.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:5–10. What lesson did Paul learn in his life and ministry about God's faithfulness and human weaknesses?

COLOSSIANS 4:12–13

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis."

ACTS 9:17

"So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"

2 TIMOTHY 1:5

"I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well."

What weaknesses have been part of your life? How have these weaknesses impacted your relationship with God?

Turn to 1 Corinthians 12:22–27. Here Paul talks about the complexity of the Body of Christ. How do weaknesses work in the Body of Christ?

What “weaknesses” can you identify in your local church community?

God’s Word comes to us and works among us in the midst of every single one of these weaknesses. Experiencing our weaknesses *together* is an essential part of experiencing life together as one Body:

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

(1 Corinthians 12:26)

Circle the words *one* and *all* in the verse above. So often we feel like *one*. I am pretty confident that Paul, Timothy, and Epaphras also sometimes felt the struggle of being *one*; but they knew God’s faithfulness in using His Word to move His people from *one* to *all*.

Colossians 1:4–5 gives clues about what it looks like when we move from *one* to *all* in our lives and churches. What three fruits did Epaphras report to Paul and Timothy as results of the Word being among the Colossians?

Since we heard of your _____ (v. 4)

and of the _____ that you have (v. 4)

because of the _____ laid up for you (v. 5)

God is the one who works faith, hope, and love into our lives. When we hear from God's Word of Christ's willingness to sacrifice Himself and rise that first Easter long ago to give us new life, faith, hope, and love are cultivated in us, and they work mysteriously among us. We also hear in God's Word of the Spirit's constant presence with us, bringing fruit and more fruit—more faith, more love, more hope. By the Spirit's power, we stand firm in our faith together. We suffer and rejoice together, loving one another even when relationships are hard, when they're exhausting, and when we'd rather ditch out. We share hope when one or many of us feel hopeless. We remind one another that Jesus is coming back for us one day; therefore, death and our struggles that *feel* like death are not the end of our stories. As we wait for Him to return, we also remind one another that Jesus is the one who brings the increasing in our faith, hope, and love, and He is the one who gives grace and more grace. The world terribly needs the fruit that only Jesus can give. May His fruit be present in and go out from each one of us and from *all* of us each day.

CONNECTED BY THE WORD

Use the Scripture memory verse for the week and the prayer prompt to bring your confession, thanksgiving, praise, and requests before our mighty and mysterious God.

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints. (Colossians 1:4)

PRAYER PROMPT

Father, You give faith, love, and hope in abundance through Your Son and Your Spirit. Be with those I know who are suffering and those who are rejoicing . . .

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Our faith, hope, and love often waver. People can and will give only imperfect expressions of these. But God gives hope that will never fail us, even when we feel hopeless. His love is 100 percent sure and true. He loves us without conditions, and He is the same today as He was yesterday and will be tomorrow. God is always and completely faithful.

Day 3


PRAYING YOU THROUGH COLOSSIANS 1:9–11

Communication is complicated, and yet most of us communicate with people constantly. One communication technique that can be useful is known as “the feedback sandwich.” I’m not sure where this method originated, but the general principle of the feedback sandwich is this: when you need to tell someone constructive criticism, you sandwich it between statements of positive affirmation. The idea is that it’s easier to hear criticism in this way, rather than being blasted by someone’s criticism. This technique can certainly be helpful for communication with family members, roommates, or anyone else who breathes the same air we do.

But the feedback sandwich is also hotly debated. Is it manipulative? Are the praise parts of the feedback sandwich actually genuine? And does the praise really matter if you tuck criticism in the middle of it? Every theory and technique in life has holes and can be misapplied. There is no one right way to communicate in every situation.

What have you found enables you to hear and receive criticism from others?

I read an article once that said constructive feedback is better described as a wrap than a sandwich. Wrapping is exactly how I would describe Paul’s approach in his Letter to the Colossians. He begins this letter by talking about his authority—he is an apostle by God’s will—and about the relationship he has with the recipients of the letter—they are his brothers and sisters, saints in the same Christ, followers of the same God. He does this so that they understand that he is the same as them before God, even while he has been appointed to speak to them on God’s behalf. Paul again highlights the relationship the readers of the letter have with the whole Body of Christ at the end of Colossians. Yet Paul also teaches about God’s authority and human



relationships in the Body of Christ throughout the letter. Therefore, Paul wraps, rather than sandwiches, his Letter to the Colossians in the overarching theological points he wants them to learn.

Remember, it is likely that Paul had never met the Colossians in person. It's easy to think people would of course just listen to the apostle Paul, because . . . well . . . he's *the apostle Paul*.

I'm not sure it works that way though.

Paul does state in the first verse of his letter that he has authority as an apostle by God's will; yet Paul understood that we don't listen to our teachers simply because they are teachers or to our parents simply because they are parents. More often, we listen and heed the words of those in authority over us because of the relationship we have with them, the concern and affection they have shown for us.

Remember the equation from day 1?

CONNECTION + AUTHORITY = LEADERSHIP

Has anyone ever given you unsolicited advice? Was it someone with whom you had only a vague relationship or no relationship at all? What did this advice-giving experience look like? What emotions did it bring up for you?

Paul and Timothy, knowing all of this about the tenderness of authority and relationship, right away at the beginning of their letter speak of their spiritual care for and investment in the Colossians. This is not fake emotional manipulation or buttering up. Paul and Timothy love the Colossians as members of the same Body, children of the same heavenly Father, bound together by the same Savior.

Read through Colossians 1:1–11. Which words and actions show that Paul and Timothy are authentically walking alongside the Colossians, rather than simply sharing an opinion or talking at them?

Prayer changes relationships. Prayer creates a level of intimacy in relationships that is different from anything the world could ever offer us. This kind of intimacy can only be created by the mysterious working of our connecting God.

οὐ παύομεθα

ou pauometha: we are not stopping

Paul's words to the Colossians are more than, "Hey, I'm praying for you! Peace out," with no follow-through. The Greek phrase in Colossians 1:9 translated as, "We have not ceased to pray for you," more literally could be translated, "We are not stopping praying and asking for you."

προσευχόμενοι

proseuchomenoi:
praying, offering petitions
(requests) to God

Can you hear the ongoing investment in the literal translation, with its *-ings*? "We can't stop. We won't stop. We must pray for you. We will keep praying for you." These small nuances reflect the authentic care Paul and Timothy show for the Colossians, even in Paul's and Timothy's daily habits. The first step in praying for someone is thinking of that someone. Prayer is always a Spirit-driven action. God is the one who brings people to our minds and grows our relationships by prompting us to pray for others.

αἰτούμενοι

aitoumenoi: asking,
requesting

I'm reminded of my husband's grandmother. Grandma Fabis was a pray-er. It wasn't uncommon to find a note from her in the mailbox once every few weeks, giving you tidbits of news and a reminder you had been prayed for. One summer, we went to Guatemala for a week to serve and support full-time missionaries. We asked Grandma to be our prayer partner. I had no idea how seriously she took this job until a few years after our travels, she showed me her prayer log. In this log she recorded who she prayed for and when each day. During our time in Guatemala, she had prayed for us no less than thirty times in a single day.

Grandma Fabis's prayers were her first gift to us. When she told us that she had been praying for us, she gave us a second gift: our relationship with her was strengthened by her prayers. This is exactly what Paul and Timothy are doing in Colossians 1:9–11.

Read Colossians 1:9–11 below, and underline each request Paul and Timothy report presenting on the Colossians' behalf.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy. (Colossians 1:9–11)

Let's learn from each of these requests by listing them in bullet points. These are all things the Colossians needed in their context, but they are certainly also things we need in our own time and place as well.

✚ SPIRITUAL WISDOM, UNDERSTANDING, AND WALKING THE WALK

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. The Colossians were being led by false teachers in their midst down a slippery slope of “you should, you must do x, y, or z to truly be a Christian.” These false teachers told them they needed particular rituals and special knowledge in order to be connected to God—something beyond what God had said in His Word.

ROMANS 10:17

“Faith comes from hearing,
and hearing through the
word of Christ.”

Paul and Timothy again and again will affirm for the Colossians that the knowledge of Jesus Christ alone, coupled with faith, is always enough for salvation. That sounds simple, but this is where spiritual wisdom and understanding come in. Spiritual understanding is the understanding brought by *faith*, rather than information. In all the circumstances of life, spiritual wisdom says Jesus alone is enough for the salvation of all people. Spiritual understanding says Jesus alone is enough for *my* salvation! Wisdom changes the head, and understanding changes the heart as well as the walk a person is walking. We can’t give ourselves wisdom or understanding any more than we can make the sun rise. But that is why Paul and Timothy pray for the Colossians to receive these gifts from God—because God is faithful to make us wise and give us understanding and insight, opening our blind eyes and our deaf ears to His Word.

Opening the Bible, as you’re doing right now in this study, and going to church to hear God’s Word are always the best ways for knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and the fruits of faith to grow. The Word keeps our legs moving on this spiritual journey, even when they get weary carrying the stuff of life.

What Scripture verses, stories, or passages have jumped out at you recently and been encouraging in your daily walk?

⚔ STRENGTH, ENDURANCE, AND PATIENCE

My head hurts anytime I’m part of a conversation about the vastness of God or one that attempts to understand His thoughts and ways. Don’t get me wrong, I enjoy it! But it is mentally taxing in a way that making dinner or returning emails is not. It is hard enough to comprehend what God says about His bigness, but then we also hear, read, or see the untruths that people come up with about God. We know that the Colossians, just like each of us, heard a thousand different messages about God from a hundred different angles. This has been true in any time and place and will continue to be true until Jesus comes again. Notice how Paul and Timothy responded to this problem: They didn’t tell the Colossians to live in a commune and avoid external contact. Instead, Paul and Timothy prayed for the Colossians’ strength.

What kind of strength did these leaders pray over the people in Colossians 1:11?

This Bible study isn't called *The Mighty and the Mysterious* for nothing. We have a powerful God. We have a glorious God. We have a mighty God.


Flip through the pages of your Bible and recall what big, mighty acts God has done. These have been recorded so we can return to them and remember His might when we need strength. List three of those big, mighty acts to help them stick in your heart and mind today.

God is also full of an everyday kind of might. There are angels guarding and keeping us while we drive around town or sleep in our beds. I'm also thinking of the might our God gives us when we need the courage to walk into a situation with a difficult family member, the guts to have the sex talk with our adolescent child, or the right words at the right time and place, though we may stumble over them imperfectly.

What small, everyday mighty acts have you seen God do in your life and home?

Paul and Timothy also pray for the Colossians to have endurance. Commentators define *endurance* as "patience coupled with restraint." The Colossians' lives were complicated. Our lives are complicated. People are complicated. Endurance isn't the act of doing all things well and all things turning out the way we'd like in the end. Rather, endurance is God-given and God-driven. It is the act of walking through the valley and the desert when we'd rather be on the mountaintop. Sometimes it is keeping our mouths closed when we'd rather speak. Sometimes it is staying put when we'd rather run. Only our mighty God can enable us to do those things. Therefore, we powerfully reflect Him to the world when we live like that.

That's why Paul and Timothy pray for the Colossians to have endurance, as well as patience *to* endure. Patience is letting God do His work in our lives when life throws us curveballs—accepting and tolerating the circumstances He sends that seem less than desirable to us because we trust Him to do what is best. It seems to me that endurance is the acting out of that patient restraint. It is not throwing the big fit, not spewing the words of hurt, not giving up; it is asking for help, opening the Word when we are disappointed, crying out to God in our weariness. Because these things are so difficult to



do and they go against all of our instincts, patience and endurance are some of the trademarks of those who are in Christ: only God causes them to grow in our lives.

☺ WITH JOY

In the Bible, the concepts of joy and endurance are both commonly connected to the idea of long-suffering.

Oh goody. ☺

Take a peek at the following verses and see for yourself. How are joy, long-suffering, and endurance connected in each passage?

Ezra 3:11–13

Romans 12:12

James 1:2–3

Sometimes life is really hard, and it seems nearly impossible to feel joy. We do not need to plaster on a fake smile and pretend to have joy in the middle of our sorrow. Nowhere in the Bible does God tell someone, “Please don’t tell Me what you’re actually thinking and feeling. I’d rather you just pretend with Me.” However, when we talk about joy in Scripture, it’s helpful to think about it as Joy with a capital J. It is a supernatural gift of God, related to His might and glory. Joy in the Book of Colossians and the rest of the Bible is the result of God showing His favor—it is undeserved and unrelated to our circumstances. Rather, it exists because of His faithfulness.

Joy, connected to long-suffering and endurance, is also connected to sacrifice—because it is connected to Christ. Paul and Timothy knew tribulation as well as Joy. Paul knew painful prayers, cried out from his prison cell, for people miles and miles away in Colossae. But he and Timothy knew the work of God’s Spirit in the middle of this mess of life, not in spite of it. And as a result, they knew just how powerful God’s strength is and how much God lavishes when He gives spiritual wisdom, understanding, endurance, and patience.

So at the end of the day, Paul’s heartfelt message to the Colossians in Colossians 1:9–11 is this:

PRAYING YOU THROUGH, COLOSSIANS. PRAYING YOU THROUGH.

What is God doing, and where is God working in our lives? Sometimes we're not sure, and often we won't know. I hope you are blessed to have someone in your life praying for you in the way Paul prayed for the Colossians. But whether you do or don't, you can rest in the promise that you have a mighty Savior who is interceding for you. He is praying you through.

Write out Romans 8:34 in the space below or, better yet, put it on a notecard or a sticky note in a place you will often see it. Let it remind you of the Joy found in your mighty Savior, the one who prays you through.

CONNECTED BY THE WORD

Use the Scripture memory verse for the week and the prayer prompt to bring your confession, thanksgiving, praise, and requests before our mighty and mysterious God.

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints. (Colossians 1:4)

PRAYER PROMPT

Christ Jesus, thank you for interceding for me every day in every way. Today I pray for the strength of Your might and Your beautiful Joy over . . .

Day 4

A SHARED INHERITANCE COLOSSIANS 1:12

I have an extreme dislike for the thumbs-up emoji. I'm grateful for relationships that are solid enough to handle weird idiosyncrasies, because this is certainly one of mine. You never really understand how badly something bothers you until you lose it regarding that thing during a random conversation, and everyone looks at you as though you have two heads. Thankfully, my extremism regarding the thumbs-up emoji manifested itself during a texting conversation with my sisters, rather than with someone else. While planning an upcoming family visit, our conversation looked something like this:

What should we make for dinner Thursday night? Or should we go out?

ME

I can bring stuff for tacos. Or do you want to grill out?

ME

CHANDRA



KELLY

I have most of the stuff for tacos if you bring shells and drinks.

CHANDRA

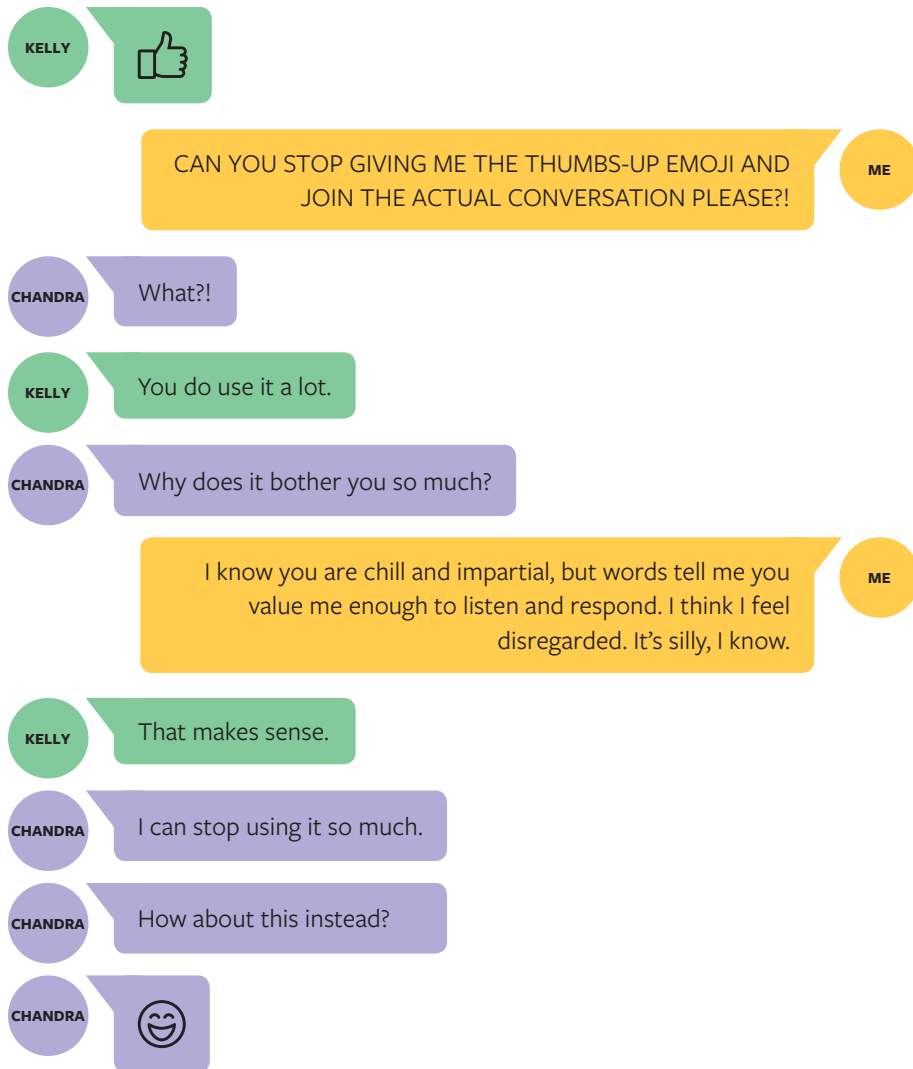


I can bring stuff for tacos. Or do you want to grill out?

ME

CHANDRA






My sisters have a good sense of humor and are usually willing to humor me—weird idiosyncrasies and all. It's not that I don't appreciate the convenience of the thumbs-up emoji. It quickly communicates, "I've got you. We're good. This plan is solid. Whatever you say. We're good to go."

However, this world often lacks affirmation. We need to hear and to express value and thankfulness in every space we can.

What in life makes you feel like I do when I receive a thumbs-up emoji?

What small habits or idiosyncrasies do you have that rob your focus and leave you forgetting to speak value over someone?



Paul regularly declared value over people, sharing his gratitude for their existence and for the life he shared with them in the Body.

In each of the following verses from Paul's letters, who is the object of thanksgiving?

1 Corinthians 1:4

Philippians 1:3–5

2 Thessalonians 1:3

1 Timothy 2:1

What people might you add to your list of praise and thanksgiving offered before God?

Prayer and thanksgiving seem to go hand in hand for Paul and Timothy. They begin in Colossians 1:3 by saying, “We always thank God . . . when we pray for you.” In the rest of Colossians 1, we see them pray that the Colossians would have spiritual wisdom and understanding, that they would walk in a way that pleases the Lord, that they would bear fruit, and that they would be strengthened with God's power. And then Paul and Timothy pray that the Colossians themselves would also be thankful.

Turn the pages of your Bible back to Colossians 1:9–12. Read the passage. Then write Colossians 1:12 in the space below. Let this exercise help focus your thoughts today on this particular verse.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

God declares value over each of us in His Word. Hear the comfort and truth of one declaration of our value in Zephaniah 3:17: “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.”

Because He does this for us, we don't *need* someone else's thanksgiving. But declaring over another person the value that God has placed on him or her can be a powerful thing.

What does Paul say in Colossians 1:12 is a reason for the Colossians to give thanks to the Father?

Paul and Timothy remind the Colossians they have been qualified before God, redeemed through Jesus' work on the cross and His resurrection over the grave. God has made them qualified. There is nothing left for them to do. They are enough.

Think of how powerful that would have been in the Colossians' context: They had false teachers among them who were saying things like, “You're not enough yet. You're not doing enough. You don't know enough. You're not enough.”

So how does Paul respond? He tells them, “You are enough. *In Christ.*”

What is devaluing about the message “You are not enough”? When you say those words out loud to yourself, what emotions come to the surface?

No matter if we are six weeks old in the womb or 108 years old, we need to hear the Word of God and be reminded that Jesus Christ has been absolutely enough on our behalf and that He makes us absolutely enough. Our value is found in whom we belong to, not what we know or how well we perform. The message of “Jesus is enough” is so vital, so central to Scripture that we could flip to any book of the Bible and find assurance there of God the Father sending God the Son as the Savior to qualify us and God the Spirit proclaiming over us:

IN CHRIST, YOU ARE ENOUGH.

We live in a world full of thumbs-up emojis. We also live in a world of “Do more, be better, you don't know enough.” We need to hear truth over and over again. Listen to these words. They are true for you, as they were true for the Colossians: in Christ, you are enough.

It's spiritually and emotionally grounding to remember the truth:


WE ARE ENOUGH IN CHRIST.

Paul gives thanks for the Colossians because of who they are in connection to Christ. They are Paul's fellow saints and his brothers and sisters. They are in Christ with him—together. Then here, in Colossians 1:12, Paul prays they

WORLDVIEW

A lens by which we see the world around us, including our experiences, our relationships, and our communities. Our worldview also determines how we understand all the good, the bad, and the ugly of this world.

(Find out more about worldview and the Book of Colossians in Video 1.)



will give thanks for one another for the same reason: they share an identity; they have been qualified by God, they are enough in Christ. This is the foundation of their relationships as believers, and it informs their worldview as they share life together. It is exactly the same for us.

We see Paul describe this shared identity in a number of ways in the New Testament.

What language of being qualified and being enough can you find in the following passages from Paul's letters?

2 Corinthians 3:4-6

Romans 8:1-4

Galatians 3:26-27

Galatians says we are sons of God in Christ Jesus. This connects to what Colossians says about our inheritance. In Christ, we receive an inheritance that comes from being God's sons and daughters. If we have been made God's children, we have a closer relationship with Him than if we had simply been called His "followers." In God's family, we don't have to hide parts of ourselves—neither our bumps, bruises, and scars, nor our abilities—because our inheritance depends on Jesus, not on us. God's family inheritance in Christ gives us hope, purpose, identity, forgiveness.

The fact that this inheritance is shared—that all of us in God's family have this inheritance—can be hard for us to swallow sometimes. We live in a "me first" culture, and let's face it: our sinful selves want to be the most special of all the special people. Sometimes we don't want someone else to be qualified for this inheritance. Sometimes we look at our skills and abilities or our successes and we think we should be more or less qualified for this inheritance than someone else. And yet God gave us a gift when he gave us one another through this shared inheritance. When we look at life around us with confusion and concern, we are not alone. The discernment and understanding that are part of our inheritance in Christ are not easy to put into practice. But we are not alone. We live in a family of believers.

What are some of the ways other people walking with Jesus, other inheritors of "enough," shine light into our lives?

The promises of God have an exponential effect among us when we see them as real, working acts of the Holy Spirit not only in our lives, but also in one another's lives. Because that is true, we study God's Word *together*, praying for God to give us knowledge and understanding *together*. We support one another as we ask hard questions *together* about the teaching we hear and wrestle to discern what aligns with the Word of Truth.

The King James translation's word choice in Colossians 1:12 helps us think of how we also share in this inheritance together in a very physical, tangible way:

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. (KJV)

Being a partaker means we get to join in and be a part of things; we aren't left out in the cold. But *partake* can also mean joining in eating or drinking, having a portion of a meal that is shared.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

In 1 Corinthians 11:23–25, Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians of these words from Luke 22:18–20 that Jesus spoke at His Last Supper. Churches everywhere continue to repeat these words—called the Words of Institution for the Lord's Supper—when they share this Sacrament together.

Where is one place we gather as children with an inheritance, according to Luke 22:18–20?

Invited together around God's table is a fellowship the world can't give. The Holy Spirit, through God's Word, knits believers together:

We hold one another up when we feel less than qualified.

We share the Word. We share our lives. We share mercy, when the world is a harsh place to be.

We ground our identity in this glorious and mighty inheritance that we receive through God the Son.

We stand as saints—together. Reminding one another we are worthy of more than simple thumbs-up emojis.

We shine the light of truth into one another's darkness when the world envelops us in falsehood.

Qualified and worthy together: friends, family, fellow saints.



CONNECTED BY THE WORD

Use the Scripture memory verse for the week and the prayer prompt to bring your confession, thanksgiving, praise, and requests before our mighty and mysterious God.

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints. (Colossians 1:4)

PRAYER PROMPT

Savior, I am not worthy of Your inheritance, but You died so that I can receive this inheritance and be a brother, a sister, in Your Father's household. Help me to claim this identity today . . .

Day 5

DARK AND LIGHT, AND LIFE WITHOUT THE CHURCH COLOSSIANS 1:12–14

Very often the world screams of darkness.

It seems to hit us like a semi-truck at some point in adulthood, but it creeps into childhood sooner than we'd like.

- school shootings
- divorce in families
- gossip all around us—finding out it's about us
- cancer, loss

What were some of the dark things of the world that you first became aware of as a child?

JOHN 1:5

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

What dark and difficult things dawned on you later, as an adult?

JOHN 16:33

"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (NIV)

In our passage for today, Paul and Timothy reminded the Colossians that they are in the kingdom of light. We all need the reminder that we are in the kingdom of light, the Light that has overcome the darkness! Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we know something other than the dark that creeps in all around us in this world.

Yesterday, we held this reminder in our hands:



YOU ARE QUALIFIED. YOU ARE ENOUGH.

Today we're going to embrace this reminder:

WE LIVE *IN THE LIGHT*.

What kinds of things first come to mind when you think about “living in the light”?

According to Colossians 1:12–14, how did we get from darkness to light?

We don't magically get from point A to point B, dark to light. We need a mediator, a redeemer, and God made a way through His Son. Jesus came down to earth and gave His life so that we might have life. His resurrection defeated death and sin's grip once and for all. In our Baptism, we die with Christ. He drowns the power of sin and death in our lives, and then we rise with Him to share in the new life He brings, which will never end. Christ did something no one else could ever do. He defeated all darkness for forever.

In the passage, circle each action that God took for our benefit:

... giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:12–14)

We can map the passage like this:

QUALIFIED > DELIVERED > TRANSFERRED > REDEEMED > FORGIVEN

I cheated a little bit. The last two words in the map are different from the words in Colossians 1:14. *Redemption* and *forgiveness* aren't verbs, are they? (I promise I passed English class!) But forgiveness and redemption do stem from verbs. And God took these actions for our benefit, just as He took the other actions mentioned in these verses—the sacrifices a mighty God made to save His family members. And He continues to take these actions for us, over and over again, throughout our lives. Let's look at each of God's actions.

WE ARE QUALIFIED.

By Christ's death and resurrection, you are enough. You are enough because the price has been paid for your sin. I know the world really, really wants us to think there is something more, something else we need. But we're going to believe God:

FORGIVEN = ENOUGH

The passage map starts and ends with forgiveness.

What are some of the world's messages about qualification? How are these very different from the message of forgiveness and grace in Jesus alone?

WE ARE DELIVERED AND TRANSFERRED.

RESCUE AND DELIVERANCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God has always been the rescuer of His people, pointing them to the rescue to come for all people in Jesus Christ, through His acts of deliverance in the Old Testament. See examples of Israel proclaiming God's deliverance in Psalm 22:4-5 and 77:13-15.


After mankind sinned, we lived in darkness, separated from God. Isolation from our fellow human beings feels lonely. But isolation from God has spiritual weight, the weight of darkness. And that weight eventually leads to death. Christ came to snatch us from the devil's grasp. He told the evil one, "Stand down!" Jesus rescued us from Satan's domain by dying and rising for us. Jesus made it possible for us to have a relationship with Him again and transferred us to His kingdom of light. Mightily and mysteriously, who He is and what He has done become true of us, as a gift.

We still see the darkness for now. But on a day that is coming soon, we will see the fulfillment of Jesus' victory over darkness. Though there is still darkness around me, Christ has delivered me and continuously delivers me from the crippling weight of that darkness.

I am still a sinner. My default is and is going to continue to be sin. Yet I'm new in Jesus. It's a mystery. It's complicated. And Satan uses all of this complication to his benefit, trying to convince us to sit in shame when we sin or to try to hide our sins away, avoiding relationship with God and those who could help us.

What are some ways that people try to hide their sins in adulthood?

Shame is Satan's attempt to convince us we are unforgivable. Christ's death begs to differ. When Christ died on the cross, our consequences became His. The punishment of our sin was transferred onto Him. There are times we can't see Jesus with us. Sometimes we don't *feel* forgiven. We struggle to see



Him working through us and in us. But Christ works His light in our lives every day anyway. He sees me in my hurt and my brokenness and brings light into my life with His hope, every day.

WE ARE REDEEMED AND LIVING IN FORGIVENESS.

Redemption means we do not live in the darkness, nor do we *belong* to the darkness.

THERE IS SOMETHING TRANSFORMING ABOUT KNOWING DARKNESS DOESN'T REIGN.

Write out 1 Thessalonians 5:5 as a reminder of our identity in the light that reigns:

Redemption intersects with our everyday surrounded-by-darkness struggles—those school shootings, divorce, all that gossip, loss—in their many and various forms.

What surrounded-by-darkness struggles would you add to the list?

Christ's redemption comes in and can make anything new, restored, transformed, transferred. He can take our darkest heartache and our deepest shame and make it beautiful in His time.

Paul knew the feeling of being surrounded by darkness in very real ways. What physical darkness did Paul experience according to Acts 9:9?

Paul, the one who had persecuted so many Christians, was transformed and fully restored. See Acts 9:17–18. How did Paul experience this both physically and spiritually?

Yet what kinds of darkness did Paul experience (described in Acts 9:22–25) even after Jesus miraculously redeemed, transformed, and restored him?

We so badly want darkness to disappear entirely; unfortunately, this side of heaven, it doesn't work that way. Even when we surround ourselves with good things, noble things, honorable things, darkness is going to fight to entrap people until Christ comes again. And yet we live in confidence that we have been redeemed from the darkness. It has no hold on us anymore because we are forgiven people who also forgive others.

Brainstorm some ways we can live in the light of truth, reflecting Jesus, even when the world we physically stand in is so dark.

THE CHURCH: LAMPSTAND AND LIGHT-BEARERS


MATTHEW 5:14–16

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Our job as the Church in the midst of a dark world is not only to rest in the truth that the darkness no longer has a hold on us. Our job is also to be light-bearers, bringing Jesus, the true light, to the world. People outside the Church are looking every which way, trying to find what makes sense of life. Though they are seeking light, they will never be able to see anything but darkness on their own. The struggle of knowing something is missing but being unable to figure it out shows itself sometimes as feelings of despair or being overwhelmed about life, or as anger, frustration, hurtfulness, condescension, contempt, and persecution toward Christians. But instead of being afraid of how people outside the Church might respond, our job is to show them Jesus, the true light, as clearly as we can. The only thing that is truly of the light is whatever points people to Jesus.

As Simeon said when he saw baby Jesus in the temple long ago:

“ . . . because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from
on high
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in
the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”
(Luke 1:78–79)



The forgiveness of God, the tender mercy of Jesus, brings the sunrise into our lives and gives light amidst the darkness all around.

Jesus, the true light, shines and shines hard through His Church into all the dark places. The darkness still presses in, but we see Christ, we hear Christ, we teach Christ, and we exist in the light of Christ, even in the midst of the dark, until He comes again and there is only light.

CONNECTED BY THE WORD

Use the Scripture memory verse for the week and the prayer prompt to bring your confession, thanksgiving, praise, and requests before our mighty and mysterious God.

WEEK 1 MEMORY VERSE

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints. (Colossians 1:4)

PRAYER PROMPT

Lord of light, You bring forgiveness and mercy where there is only hurt and hatred. Help us to shine Your light into our homes and the world around us

...

Week 1 Extra

“IN CHRIST” SCAVENGER HUNT

“In Christ” is one of the most common phrases found throughout all the New Testament letters, and many of these references are found in Paul’s letters. The word *in* may seem to be a small detail, but it speaks mercy. *In* means we have a relationship with God in Christ, and that relationship brings us salvation. “In Christ” means yesterday, today, and forever He is at work in me. “In Christ” invites me into constant conversation with God as a member of His family.

Use this list of Scripture verses to find many of the references to “in Christ” in Paul’s writing, according to the ESV translation. What promise does being “in Christ” hold for you in each verse?

Romans 3:22–24		1 Corinthians 15:18–19	
Romans 6:3–4		2 Corinthians 1:5	
Romans 6:11		2 Corinthians 1:21–22	
Romans 8:1–2		2 Corinthians 2:14–17	
Romans 8:38–39		2 Corinthians 5:17–19	
Romans 9:1		2 Corinthians 12:19	
1 Corinthians 1:2–4		Galatians 2:4	
1 Corinthians 1:30		Galatians 2:16–17	
1 Corinthians 3:1		Galatians 3:14	
1 Corinthians 4:10–17		Galatians 3:26–28	

Galatians 5:6		Colossians 1:28	
Ephesians 1:1–3		Colossians 2:5–6	
Ephesians 1:9–12		1 Thessalonians 1:3	
Ephesians 2:6–7		1 Thessalonians 4:16	
Ephesians 2:10–13		1 Thessalonians 5:18	
Ephesians 3:6		2 Thessalonians 1:1	
Ephesians 3:20–21		1 Timothy 1:14–16	
Ephesians 4:32		2 Timothy 1:1	
Philippians 1:1		2 Timothy 1:9	
Philippians 1:26–27		2 Timothy 1:13	
Philippians 2:1–2		2 Timothy 2:1–3	
Philippians 2:4–5		2 Timothy 2:10–13	
Philippians 3:9		Philemon 8–9	
Philippians 3:14		Philemon 20	
Philippians 4:7		Philemon 23	
Philippians 4:19–21			
Colossians 1:2–4			
Colossians 1:24			