

COLOSSIANS

A sunset scene with a large tree silhouette on the right side. The sun is partially obscured by a mountain range in the distance. The sky is a gradient of orange and red.

Continue to live your lives in
Him, rooted and built up in Him

IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS
(6 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION
BIBLE STUDIES

CONTENTS

Contents	page 03
Getting the most out of these studies	page 04
Introducing Colossians	pages 05
Study 1: Colossians 1:1-23 – Thanksgiving and the Supremacy of Christ	pages 06-07
Study 2: Colossians 1:24-2:7 – Authenticity in Life and Ministry	pages 08-09
Study 3: Colossians 2:6-23 – The Fullness of Christ	pages 10-11
Study 4: Colossians 3:1-17 – New Life and Lifestyle	pages 12-13
Study 5: Colossians 3:18-4:1 – Whole-Life Transformation	pages 14-15
Study 6: Colossians 4:2-18 – Prayerful and Distinctive Living	pages 16-17
Memory Verses	page 20

THE SMALL PRINT

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Co

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GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THESE STUDIES

Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

INTRODUCING COLOSSIANS

Paul's letter to the Colossians was probably written while he was written in Rome (though some argue for Ephesus or Caesarea) and is usually dated (along with Ephesians and Philemon) between 60-62AD. During this period Paul was under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16-31). The church in the city of Colossi was probably established during Paul's third missionary journey but it seems unlikely that he visited the place personally. For three years Paul worked in Ephesus and 1:6b-8 tells us that Epaphras (a Colossian) founded the church probably having encountered Paul in Ephesus. At the end of the letter it is clear that Epaphras is back with Paul (4:12) and he also gets a mention in Philemon 1:23.

Having been a leading city in Asia Minor (now Turkey) because of its position on the Lycus river and the great east-west trading route, Colosse had taken a few steps backwards somewhat by the time of Paul. It had been overtaken by the nearby towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis (referred to in 4:13). In 4:15 Paul refers to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea (also mentioned in Rev 3) and to the house church that met in the home of Nympha. All these churches would have been predominantly gentile.

The main theme of Paul's letter to the Colossians is that when we faithfully proclaim the gospel it will bear fruit in people's lives. We need God's strength to keep going faithfully with joy, remembering our salvation. Colossians shows us that we must be praying for ourselves and those engaged in spreading the gospel to remain faithful. We should be thankful for all that Jesus has done for us.

In 2:4 Paul says he is writing so that *no one may delude you with plausible arguments*. His key concern is that they continue with Christ 1:23: that *just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him* 2v6. The danger seems to be that some false teachers are saying that it's fine to begin to with Christ but if you really want the full Christian experience you need something extra: Jesus plus... In chapter 2 Paul fleshes out some of the characteristics of this heresy: we see that it is all about obedience to certain rules/traditions (2:20-21), having certain angelic experiences (2:18), being circumcised (2:11) and obeying certain Jewish rituals (2:16). These false teachers were making the Christians at Colossae feel second rate. The danger is that by trusting in these other rules or rituals, they are stopping them from trusting in Christ *alone* and so are in danger of *being disqualified* (2:18). These things fall into two camps: things that are predominantly Jewish in nature and those that were the early seeds of Gnosticism.

Paul's purpose in writing to the Colossians is to refute such heretical teaching by drawing their attention to the supremacy of Christ. Paul describes him as the *image of the invisible God* (1:15), the Creator (1:16), the one through whom *all things hold together* (1:17), the *head of the church* (1:18), the *firstborn from the dead* (1:18), the one in whom all the *fullness of God dwells* (1:19; 2:9) and the *reconciler* (1:20-22). Paul helps us see that Jesus is all sufficient for all that we need and there is no place to add anything to the gospel. The challenge for us is to trust in Christ alone for our Salvation.

Steve McClure
Spring 2019

STUDY 1 – COLOSSIANS 1:1-23 – THANKSGIVING AND THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION: Having introduced himself, Paul begins his letter to the Colossians by explaining why he is thankful for them and what he is asking God for on their behalf. Then Paul begins a passionate defence of the supremacy of Christ exhorting the Colossians to worship Him alone.

SETTING THE SCENE (v1-2, 7-8): What do these verses tell us about why Paul wrote this letter to people that were strangers to him? (See also 2:4-8) Paul says that he learned about them and their faith from Epaphras – what evidence is there that these Colossians had come to know Christ?

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FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE (v3-5): What causes Paul to be thankful for the Colossians? How are faith, hope and love related to one another? What is your experience of these qualities coming together in Christian community? What or who are you thanking God for?

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THE GOSPEL SPREADS (v5-8): What impresses you about the way that the gospel was spreading (v5-8)? How have you seen the gospel bearing fruit and growing (See example of Epaphras)?

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PRAYING BIG PRAYERS (v9-14): What else does Paul pray for here and why are they so important? How often do you pray these kinds of “big” prayers? In what ways do you see these qualities developing in your own life? How do these verses help you appreciate what God has done for you?

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ALL THINGS (v15-23): Identify words such as “all”, “every” and “fullness”: What point do you think that Paul is trying to make? Why do you think that Paul writes these things in particular and how do they fit into the letter as a whole? How might they address the heresies rife in the city of Colossae?

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THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST (v15-20): What do we learn about Jesus (See also Heb 1:1-4, John 1:1-14)? In what ways and over what is Christ and his work on the cross both “supreme” (ESV: pre-eminent) and “sufficient”? What does it mean that Christ is the “head of the body, the church”? Why is this important and how is this headship evident (or not) in your experience?

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RECONCILED BY CHRIST (v21-23): How does Paul summarise the transformation that had gone on in the lives of the Colossians and to what extent can you relate to this? What does it mean to continue in the faith, to be established & firm and not moved (v23)? Does Paul’s use of the word “if” imply that our reconciliation is conditional upon “continuing in the faith” (v23)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What impact would Paul have been praying that his words would have in the lives of the Colossians? How does this passage encourage you to pray and worship God? What impact have these verses had on you and what difference might it make in your life?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Give thanks to God and pray some of these ‘big prayers’ for one another. Worship Jesus for all that He is and all that He means to you. Share and pray together about the things that tend to challenge the supremacy of Christ in your own lives.

MEMORY VERSES: COLOSSIANS 1:19-20

STUDY 2 – COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:7 – AUTHENTICITY IN LIFE AND MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION: In this section Paul shares his approach to life and ministry; we read of his struggles, his goal / purpose in life and the resources he relies on to live this out.

SETTING THE SCENE: What does Paul say about his ministry and God's commission to him? What are Paul's aims in his ministry? How does Paul show his concerns for the church in Colossae? In all that Paul says in these verses what can we see of Paul's authenticity?

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REJOICING IN SUFFERING (1:24-25): What do you think Paul meant when he claimed to "fill up in his flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions"? In what ways do you think the Church continues in Christ's sufferings today?

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WHAT A MYSTERY (1:26-27): What is this mystery that represents the "word of God in all its fullness" (See also 2:2-3)? Why would this be shocking for both Gentiles and Jews at Colossae? What do you understand Paul to mean when he says that "Christ in you" is the "hope of glory"?

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BECOMING MATURE IN CHRIST (1:28-29): What does Paul's aim to "present everyone mature in Christ" look like in practice? Should this be an aim that we have for others? How have others helped to present you "mature in Christ"?

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STANDING FIRM IN THE FAITH (2:1-5): How can Paul be “contending for” the Colossians when he has never met them (See also 4:12)? Paul describes specific signs of Christian maturity; why do you think that Paul emphasises these in particular? What is essential if we are to stand firm in the faith and not be misled? How can we gain encouragement to continue and become more established?

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SPIRITUAL GROWTH (2:6-7): How do the characteristics of consistency (*as you received...so live*), maturity (*as you were rooted...be built up*) and Knowledge (*As you were taught...be established in truth*) help you picture what it means to grow spiritually?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: To what extent can you relate to Paul’s struggles, priorities and goals for life and ministry? What are you learning from your journey of growing in Christ?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Pray together about your life and ministry that you would be real / authentic and motivated by a sense of purpose; to see others becoming mature in Christ. Ask God to help each of you to continue growing in your faith and share with one another what this might in entail.

MEMORY VERSES: COLOSSIANS 1:28-29

STUDY 3 – COLOSSIANS 2:6-23 – THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION: In this section of the letter Paul encourages the Colossians to make sure that they did not allow themselves to be taken captive by human traditions and philosophies. Instead Paul points them to the fullness of Christ and all that is theirs in Him.

SETTING THE SCENE: Look through the whole passage and identify what are the instructions that Paul gives to the Colossians; specifically what are the major things that Paul is warning the Colossians to be careful about and/or to avoid?

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DO NOT BE TAKEN CAPTIVE (v8-15): Paul says “see to it that no-one takes you captive”; what kinds of things do we allow ourselves to be taken captive by? (See also 1 Tim 6:20, Eph 5:6)

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- **PHILOSOPHIES AND TRADITIONS (v9-10):** How is the message of Christ different from the hollow and deceptive philosophies of human tradition? How do you respond to the idea of being “brought to fullness in Christ”?

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- **CIRCUMCISION (v11-12):** What was the purpose of circumcision in the Old Testament (See Gen 17:9-14)? With that in mind what do you think Paul means by the circumcision done by Christ?

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- **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CROSS (v13-15):** How do you understand what Paul says about the implication and the significance of what happened on the cross? How does Paul show that these additions to the gospel were of no value?

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DO NOT LET ANYONE JUDGE YOU OR DISQUALIFY YOU (v16-23): In what ways do we tend to allow others to 'judge' or 'disqualify' us?

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- **RITUALS (v16-17):** What 'shadows' were the Colossians adding to the reality they had found in Christ? What shadows are we tempted to add today? What does it mean to 'judge others' and to allow others to 'judge us'?

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- **EXPERIENCES (v18-19):** How might we be disqualified from the prize by those who 'delight in false humility and the worship of angels'? What experiences might people try to convince us are essential today?

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- **RULES (v20-23):** Why does Paul say that legalism and asceticism (denial of worldly pleasures) are useless in making us spiritually mature or more complete in Christ? What are the 'basic principles of this world' and why should we not submit to them?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Many aspects of faith are helpful but not essential for salvation (e.g. spiritual disciplines); in what ways might we be in danger of adding to Christ and the work He has accomplished for us? In light of these things what does it mean to live out what Paul says in v6-7?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share about the areas in which this is a real challenge for you; i.e. the things that you are tempted to add to the good news of Jesus Christ. Pray for one another in these things that you would rest in Christ and His death for us on the cross alone.

MEMORY VERSES: COLOSSIANS 2:6-7

STUDY 4 – COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 – NEW LIFE AND LIFESTYLE

INTRODUCTION: In this section Paul points our hearts and minds to things above rather than to earthly things. He tells us to put to death anything that hinders (v1-11) and instead to clothe ourselves with the clothes arising from our new life in Christ (v12-17).

SETTING THE SCENE: Looking back to 2:16-23, what kind of things do you think that the false teachers might have been encouraging the Colossians to do or not to do? How does this compare with how we often try to deal with sin?

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HEARTS AND MINDS (v1-4): What reasons does Paul give for why we should set our hearts and minds on Christ? What does Paul mean by “things above” and “earthly things”? What in practice does it look like to “set” our hearts and minds on things above? What are the earthly things that we find ourselves “setting” our hearts and minds upon?

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A NEW IDENTITY (v1-14): What truths are listed here about our standing before God (v1-14)? How does (or how should) knowing our identity in Christ affect our behaviour (See also 1:12-14,2:9-10)?

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PUTTING ON, PUTTING OFF: (v5-12): Paul uses a number of metaphors here; “put to death” (v5), “rid yourselves” (v8), “take off your old self” (v9), “put on the new self” (v10) and “clothe yourselves (v12). How do these metaphors encourage us to live according to this new identity?

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Compare the two lists of what we need to put on (v12-14) and what we need to cast off (v5-11). How are these behaviours and attitudes consistent or inconsistent with our new life in Christ? What other motivations to change does Paul mention here?

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What positive or negative impact do you think that these behaviours and attitudes might have on others around you (e.g. friends, family, housemates, course mates etc.)?

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BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER (v13-14): How do Paul's instructions on how to handle grievances (v13-14) contrast with how our culture handles conflict? How could conflict be better dealt with if peace ruled (v15)?

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THE WORD DWELLING RICHLY (v15-17): How can we let the "word of Christ dwell among us richly" (See also Eph 5:18-20)? Why does Paul emphasise the significance of thankfulness (v15, 16, 17)? How will doing everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus" transform what we say and do (v17)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: In contrast to 2:16-23 how are these "new clothes" a more 'fitting' outworking of the fullness we have in Christ? What has God been saying to you about the new life and lifestyle we have in Him?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Focus in on one or two of the challenging things that Paul has been saying to us in this passage. Share your struggles and ask God for the power to overcome them and live the life that He has prepared for you.

MEMORY VERSES: COLOSSIANS 3:1-2

INTRODUCTION: In this passage Paul turns to the environments of the home and the workplace as he continues to paint a picture of the attitudes and behaviour that should characterise us as believers. Also printed is an alternate passage (covering the same topics but in more depth) from Ephesians; it is reproduced for means of comparison but the focus should remain on the verses in Colossians.

SETTING THE SCENE: What is your initial response to Paul’s commands to wives and husbands, children and parents and slaves and masters? How do you think your non-Christian friends would respond to this perspective on life at home and work?

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HUSBANDS-WIVES (v18-19): Bearing in mind 3:1-17; what do you think it looks like (or doesn’t look like) for wives to “submit to their husbands” and “husbands to love their wives”? What does Paul mean by the phrase “as is fitting in the Lord”?

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How do you respond to the unconditional nature of these instructions? How would the relationship be different under the various scenarios; (1) both obeying the command, (2) neither obeying the command or (3) only one party obeying the command?

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CHILDREN-FATHERS (v20-21): Why do you think that the basic command to children is to “obey”? What do you think it looks like for parents to teach obedience without embittering or discouraging their children? What difference would it make to family relationships if the members wanted to please the Lord and encourage one another?

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SLAVES-MASTERS (v22-4:1): What does Paul say should or shouldn't our attitude or motivation be towards our work/studies? What do you think it looks like to have "sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord", to "work with all your hearts" and to work "for the Lord, not for men?"
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THE NATURE OF SUBMISSION: What is submission and what does it look like in practice for us as slaves, employees or students? What difference would it make if we took this kind of approach to our studies? How can our attitude and how we undergo our studies/work be a witness to others (See also Titus 2, 1 Thess 4)?
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RIGHT AND FAIR: What would be the cost for a master to provide slaves with what is "right and fair"? How should the knowledge that we have a "master in heaven" affect the master's attitude towards himself and his slaves?
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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What specific things do you think that God is saying to you about your relationships, attitudes and motivations in how you go about your daily life at work and in the home?
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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thinking about your current relationships, share some of the joys and challenges you face to live godly and distinctive lives. Pray for one another that in all these relationships you would work at it with all your hearts and please the LORD.

MEMORY VERSES: COLOSSIANS 3:23-24

STUDY 6 – COLOSSIANS 4:2-18 – PRAYERFUL AND DISTINCTIVE LIVING

INTRODUCTION: In this final section of the letter Paul encourages us to make the most of every opportunity to share our faith, a process that is bound up with our prayer lives, what we do and what we say. We also get various personal messages and greetings.

SETTING THE SCENE: In what sense do prayer and evangelism go hand in hand? What is your experience of praying for opportunities to share the gospel? How often do you ask for these opportunities and how does God tend to answer you? If you don't what holds you back from asking?

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PRAYING FOR OPPORTUNITIES (v2-4): What does it mean to be watchful and thankful? What does Paul ask the Colossians to pray for? What does it mean to be devoted to prayer? What do these verses teach us about what our priorities should be in prayer?

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WISE IN THE WAY WE ACT (v5)? What does it look like to be 'wise in the way we act towards outsiders'? What does it mean for us to 'make the most of every opportunity'? What opportunities has God been giving you lately and have you made the most of them?

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SPEAKING FOR CHRIST (v6): What does it mean for our conversation to be 'full of grace' and 'seasoned with salt '(v6)? Why does Paul say that these qualities help us to know how to answer everyone? In what ways do you think such conversation would prompt questions from non-Christians?

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FINAL GREETINGS: Why do you think that Paul includes so many greetings at the end of this letter? What do we know about the characters mentioned here? See *Luke*, *Onesimus & Archippus* (Philemon), *Tychicus* (Ephesians 6:21, 2 Timothy 4:12 & Titus 3:12), *Epaphras* (1:7-8, Philemon 1:23), *Demas* (2 Timothy 4:10, Philemon 1:24), *Aristarchus* (Acts 19:29, 20:4, 27:2).

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PRAYERFUL CONCERN: Epaphras had taken the gospel to Colossae (1:7-8) and Paul commends him for his ongoing concern. How do you understand Paul's comment that Epaphras was "always wrestling in prayer for them"? How applicable were his prayers (v12) in light of the challenges in Colossae?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What can we learn from Paul's capacity and passion for people; caring for them, taking an interest in them, commending and encouraging them? What things stand out for you from all that Paul has been sharing in this letter?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Pray together for a handful of your non- Christian friends asking God to work in their lives and give you opportunities to share your faith with them. Pray that your lives would create curiosity / questions and that all you say would gently point them to Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE: COLOSSIANS 4:6

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1: COLOSSIANS 1:13-23 – THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:19-20

STUDY 2: COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:7 – AUTHENTICITY IN LIFE AND MINISTRY

²⁸ He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Colossians 1:28-29

STUDY 3: COLOSSIANS 2:6-23 – THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Colossians 2:6-7

STUDY 4: COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 – NEW LIFE AND LIFESTYLE

¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Colossians 3:1-2

STUDY 5: COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1 – WHOLE-LIFE TRANSFORMATION

²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Colossians 3:23-24

STUDY 6: COLOSSIANS 4:2-18 – PRAYERFUL AND DISTINCTIVE LIVING

⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Colossians 4:6