

*discover*  
**COLOSSIANS**



LEADER GUIDE

*discover*  
**COLOSSIANS**



*CoffeeBreak*





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# To the Leader

## **Prepare the Lesson**

Bible discovery leaders help people discover together what the Bible says and means. They are not teachers but guides, facilitators, and conversation leaders.

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader by coming alongside you in your own personal work. Always answer the study guide questions first, using the suggested basic steps of preparation. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage.

We encourage you to study ahead of time so that you do not have to rely on the leader guide during your Bible study group meeting. You don't want to give the impression that the leader guide is an answer book. The answers are in the Bible; you are a guide to help your group find the answers in God's Word.

This leader guide aims to include helpful ideas from a number of sources. Ideally you should use this information *only after* you have studied the text yourself. Read the passage and first ask your own questions. Allow God to speak to you through his Word. Look for answers in the text. What was God saying to the original readers and listeners, and what is he saying to us today? Consult the glossary if there are names and places with which you are unfamiliar.

## **Get Ready to Lead**

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

The "Conversation" boxes in the study guide are for extra questions. The text of the leader guide includes many extra questions that you may wish to use to help build the group's conversation around the text. We also suggest that you adapt the questions in the booklet or write your own questions as needed. You know the interests, personalities, and needs of your group members. You know what they will be curious about or when they will want to dig deeper into a Scripture passage. Put those extra conversation-building questions in the "Conversation" boxes and use them during your group time to help get dialogue started.

Also, encourage group members to put their own questions and discoveries in the “Conversation” boxes. By doing this, they will also be preparing for the group discussion. You might want to start a group discussion by saying, “What is in your ‘Conversation’ box? What would you like to talk about together?”

If you are able to prepare and pray thoroughly before each group session, you will be able to lead without frequent references to your notes. This will free you to be more aware of the work of the Holy Spirit during your group discussion time and to focus more effectively on your facilitation and leadership responsibilities. You will also be able to keep better eye contact and listen more carefully.

### **Lead with Questions**

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions with smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others into truth by using questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Use the comments in this leader guide to help the discovery process of your group. You are leading a conversation on the text, and you want to help guide the conversation so that group members will hear the “big ideas” from the text rather than getting bogged down in small details. Avoid using this leader material to “teach” the lesson.

**Assume that you will not use all the information supplied in this leader guide.** Ask questions that will help you get at what the text says and means. *There are additional questions in bold that may help to clarify the discussion. However, do not feel that you have to answer all of these questions.* Members of your group may have their own questions. Use questions as well as the comments in the leader guide only when it is helpful to guide and clarify your group’s conversation on the text. The information is supplied to help you guide the discussion and answer some questions that may arise. *Do not bring up information simply because you find it interesting.* Introduce it only if it will help the members of your group. In other words, tailor the questions to your particular group members. If some people in your group are new to the Bible, make certain that you help to clarify information. But do not use extra background material that may add confusion. Feel free to delve a bit deeper

with groups who may be familiar with the Bible. However, keep in mind the evangelistic purpose of this study and make certain that you are being most sensitive to members who may be new to Bible study and may not yet be believers in Christ.

Should differences of opinion arise, allow members to disagree. Your purpose is not to win arguments or even to defend a particular idea. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of your group members.

### **Help to Apply**

Ask God to guide you to ask application questions throughout the lesson when it seems appropriate for your group. As leader, pray that God will first teach you what he wants you to hear from his Word. Then ask God to guide you in helping others hear what he is saying to them. **Keep in mind that the purpose of this study is not to fill minds with facts but to change hearts as we learn what God is teaching us through his Word.**

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Holy Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take some time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do additional follow-up reflection at home.

# Glossary of Terms

**angels**—supernatural beings created by God to be messengers, to carry out God’s will in this world, and to serve and care for all who belong to God (Ps. 91:11-12).

**Archippus**—probably an evangelist working in Colossae; he may also have served in Laodicea or in nearby Hierapolis (see Col. 4:13, 17).

**apostle**—“one sent forth”; refers to a messenger sent on a special mission. The New Testament apostles were leaders in the early Christian church; they were specially chosen by Jesus to be his witnesses (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8, 21-26; 9:1-15; 1 Cor. 9:1-2).

**Aristarchus**—a Jewish follower of Christ and an associate and companion of Paul throughout Greece. He was imprisoned with Paul.

**baptism**—the act of applying water to a person to indicate a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. How the water is applied (the mode) varies in different church traditions: it can be through immersion (going completely underwater), sprinkling, pouring, or dipping. Many churches baptize infants, and many churches baptize older children and teens who express their faith in Christ. Both kinds of churches also baptize adult converts. Churches that baptize infants consider baptism as a covenant sign replacing circumcision. As they grow up, children baptized as infants must appropriate the promises made for them by their parents at their baptism by expressing faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. The symbolism of baptism is that of the washing away of sin through Christ’s death, and of dying to sin through Christ’s death and rising with Christ to new life (Rom. 6:1-14). The symbol, also called a sacrament, has no saving effect but is a declaration of faith in Christ, a recognition of God’s claim on one’s life, and a sign of being welcomed into God’s family.

**Christ (Jesus)**—the second person of the Trinity; the name *Christ* means “Anointed One.” Jesus, the Son of God, came to save God’s people from the oppression of sin and death and to give them new life forever with God. See also **Jesus (Christ)**.

**circumcision**—removal of the male foreskin. God commanded Abraham and his descendants to do this as a sign that they belonged to God and as a symbol of the cutting away of sin from their lives (Gen. 17). In the New Testament circumcision is replaced with baptism in Christ. True circumcision is of the heart, not the flesh (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Col. 2:9-12).



**Colossae**—an ancient city in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), located in the Lycus River Valley.

**deity**—another word for “God.”

**Demas**—an associate and disciple of Paul who was with him when he wrote the letter to the Colossians (4:14). Demas later deserted Paul (2 Tim. 4:10).

**dominion of darkness**—any place outside of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of light (Col. 1:12-13). The ruler of this domain is Satan, an angel who rebelled against God and now seeks to promote evil, confusion, chaos, and destruction in God’s creation (see Rev. 12).

**earthly**—refers sometimes to things of the physical, material world but can also refer to our sinful nature.

**elemental spiritual forces of this world**—literally “elements of the cosmos”; can also mean “basic principles of this world” (Col. 2:8, 20). This term, according to the *NIV Study Bible*, may refer to “false, worldly, elementary, religious teachings” or “evil spiritual powers.”

**Epaphras**—On the basis of Paul’s comments in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12-13, it is likely that Epaphras was from the region around Colossae and that he founded not only the church there but also churches in the neighboring communities of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

**Father**—see **God the Father**.

**firstborn**—In the culture of Paul’s day the firstborn son held the place of supreme honor among his siblings and inherited the lordship (sovereignty) over the household or family estate. So this term used in reference to Christ as “the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15) indicates that he has the power and is Lord (sovereign) over all creation.

**flesh**—When Paul refers to “the flesh” (as Col. 2:11, 13), he is talking about the sinful state of human beings, or the sinful human nature. (See also Eph. 2:3.)

**Gentiles**—all peoples who are not of the Jewish people.

**grace**—God’s kindness, undeserved favor, and forgiving love; won for believers through Christ’s death in their place.

**God the Father**—the first person of the Trinity (the second person is Jesus the Son, and the third person is the Holy Spirit). The Father sent Jesus into the world to save us from the curse of sin and death and to give us new life. The Father and Son also send the Spirit to live

in us and guide us in Christlike living, making us “God’s holy people” (Col. 1:2).

**gospel**—from the Greek word that means “good news.” The gospel is the good news that God’s Son, Jesus Christ, took the punishment for our sins by dying on the cross and brought us new life by rising from death. He ascended into heaven, where he rules over all things, and he will someday return to earth. All who believe in Christ are promised eternal life.

**holy**—pure; set apart to bring glory to God.

**Holy Spirit**—the third person of the Trinity, equal to and one with God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit makes people aware of their sin, brings true faith into their hearts, and enables them to live in obedience to God.

**hope**—in combination with faith this means looking ahead in solid trust to the fulfillment of all God’s promises (Heb. 7:19; 11:1).

**idolatry**—worshiping something other than God. It can mean bowing down to a physical image of a god, but Paul uses it in Colossians to mean allowing one’s own desires to become more important than God.

**inheritance of the saints**—eternal life with Christ, which is a gift of God to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior.

**Jesus (Christ)**—the second person of the Trinity; his name means “Savior.” See also **Christ (Jesus)**.

**Jews**—the people of Israel, descendants of Abraham; God’s special people chosen to be a blessing to all other nations (Gen. 12:2-3).

**kingdom of light**—another term for the kingdom of God, God’s rule over all creation, especially evident in the lives of his people, who follow Jesus and believe in him as Savior. Jesus’ central message is the good news that “the kingdom of God is near” (Mark 1:15).

**Luke**—a historian and physician. He was a companion of Paul and wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts in the New Testament.

**Laodicea**—a city about 12 miles (19.3 km) from Colossae.

**Mark**—also called John (see Acts 12:12, 25) and most likely the writer of the gospel of Mark. He was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10) and a companion of Paul. Mark was not one of Christ’s twelve disciples, but he was an eyewitness to many of the events of Jesus’ life.

**new self**—the new nature that comes into a person by faith in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit’s power working in that person.

**Nympha**—a Christian woman who served as host for the house church that met in Laodicea.

**old self**—the part of our human nature that still lives in disobedience to God.

**Onesimus**—a slave who was part of the Christian community of Colossae. His master was Philemon. He had run away and had later met up with Paul and had become his companion. Along with the letter to the Colossians, Paul sent a letter to Philemon urging him to receive Onesimus back “as a brother in the Lord” (Philemon 16).

**peace**—a result of being reconciled to God through Christ, yielding an assurance of well-being and freedom (guided by the Spirit) to live in relationship with God and others (see Col. 3:15; see also Rom. 5:1-11).

**psalms**—prayers of ancient Israel that were written down and set to music, with subjects ranging from praise and thanks to lament and trust. Most psalms emphasize God’s power, love, and holiness as contrasted with human weakness. See the book of Psalms in the Old Testament.

**redemption**—the act of buying something back that has been held in debt. In ancient times it was common for people to sell themselves into servitude or slavery (often temporarily) because they had no other way to pay a debt. If someone else redeemed (ransomed) them by paying the debt for them, the debt was forgiven (see Lev. 25:35-55). In Colossians 1:14 the apostle Paul refers to the redemption payment that Christ gave to free us from our debt of sin. Because he paid this debt with his own life by dying in our place, our sins are forgiven.

**Scythian**—the name of a tribal people from around the Black and Caspian Seas who were considered brutally barbaric; they were often described as little more than wild beasts.

**Spirit**—see **Holy Spirit**.

**Timothy**—a spiritual “son” who was a companion of Paul and is included in the greeting in the opening verses of Paul’s letter to the Colossians. (See also Acts 16:1-3; 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy.)

**Tychicus**—a companion and fellow worker with Paul who carried Paul’s letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:7).

# 1 Colossians 1:1-14

## Thanksgiving and Prayer

### Getting Started

The book of Colossians is a letter written by the apostle Paul in the first century A.D. to a church in the small city of Colossae, located in present-day Turkey. It is likely that Paul wrote this letter and several others while he was in prison in Rome, awaiting trial for preaching the message of salvation in Christ. The church in Colossae had been started by Epaphras, a “minister of Christ” (Col. 1:7) from the local area who had worked with Paul. In this study we will look at what Paul wrote to this church and what God is saying to us today through this letter to the Colossians.

### Optional Share Question

**Do you typically write letters or notes to your friends, or do you prefer phoning or emailing or texting?**

The optional share question introduces a simple idea for an “icebreaker” to help everyone get acquainted and to help put newcomers at ease. You may want to come up with your own share question; just make sure it can be answered with a word or phrase rather than a few sentences. Take care also that your share question has to do with everyday life so that anyone new to the Bible will feel comfortable answering it.

In the lesson material that follows, the *a*, *b*, *c* questions in italics are for discussing the passage. These same questions are included in the study guide for your group members. The bulleted questions in bold print are optional. Use whichever of these questions will be helpful to the discovery process for *your* particular group. You can jot down those questions, or any others that you think would be helpful, in the “Conversation” boxes in your study guide. Group participants should also be encouraged to write their own questions in the “Conversation” boxes in their study guides.

Some additional related Scriptures are listed at the end of each lesson (under the heading “For Further Study”). These passages are mentioned at various points in the leader’s notes for the lesson, and if you have time, you may want to discuss some of these with your group as you

work through the lesson together. Some group members will find the list helpful if they want to look up the additional Scriptures at home.

## **What Does It Say?**

### **1. Colossians 1:1-2**

a. *How does Paul describe himself and the people to whom he is writing? Who else is included in his greeting to them?*

- **What is an apostle? How did Paul get his job?**
- **Who was his “boss”?**
- **What does the phrase “by the will of God” mean?**

Having never visited the believers in Colossae, Paul begins his letter to them by establishing his authority, saying he is “an apostle of Christ Jesus.” An apostle is a chosen ambassador, literally “one who is sent.” Paul wanted to make clear that he had not appointed himself as an apostle; rather, it had been “by the will of God.” God had initiated Paul’s calling to share the news of Jesus to the non-Jewish (Gentile) world. Paul emphasizes that his authority is from God and so is his message. Notice that Paul also mentions Timothy. Ask group members to supply information they might know about Timothy. If they have not yet consulted the glossary, it will be helpful to do that with your group.

- **What does it mean to be “holy people” and “faithful brothers and sisters in Christ”?**

Paul considered all people who followed Christ to be brothers and sisters in the family of God. Christ is the center and source of their relationship; their belief in Christ bonds them into a family. Through faith in Christ we are all adopted by God the Father into this family. It may be helpful to refer to the definition of “holy” in the glossary. Some translations of the Bible also use the word “saints” here instead of “holy people.” That could be confusing for anyone who usually thinks of a saint as being a rare individual who has done something miraculous and therefore has special standing before God. The word for “saint” in the Bible (*hagios*) actually refers to someone whom God has “set apart,” or made “holy.” So all people who follow Christ are “saints,” or “holy people.”

Note that the word “holy,” like the phrase “brothers and sisters,” is closely linked to the phrase “in Christ.” Only “in Christ” had the Colossian believers been made holy through his death. Because of what Christ did for them, they also were set apart for service. Christ had died in their place, and God had accepted them, had forgiven their disobedience, and had given them new life through his Spirit to help in his work. If group members have questions about this concept, offer a brief explanation now and assure them that they will have opportunity to explore it further in later lessons.

*b. What does Paul want for the Christians in Colossae?*

- **What is grace and peace?**
- **Who gives grace and peace?**
- **Why is God referred to as “the Father”?**
- **How are grace and peace experienced in a person’s life?**

Paul often began his letters using the phrase “grace and peace.” It was a common greeting during Paul’s time. But it was not simply a greeting; Paul deeply desired that the brothers and sisters in Colossae would experience both grace and peace. Consider exploring with your group what these words mean to them. Discuss the definitions of these words in the glossary. Encourage your group members to consider how God as our Father gives them both grace and peace.

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## **2. Colossians 1:3-6**

*a. For what is Paul thankful? What has he heard about the people in Colossae?*

- **What does this tell you about Paul? About the people in Colossae?**
- **In whom do the people have faith?**
- **What is their hope?**
- **When and why has Paul been thankful as he remembers the people in Colossae?**

- **What do Paul’s words suggest about the relationship between faith and love?**
- **How does the hope that Paul mentions in verse 5 differ from the way people typically express what they wish and hope for?**
- **Does the Christian hope simply mean being faithful now in order to get a reward later? Explain.**

(Though there are many bold-print questions here, use only those that will help your group as you discuss the passage with them.)

Paul lets the people know that he is praying for them and that they are often in his thoughts. It surely must have encouraged them to know that Paul cared about them and thanked God for them. Notice also that Paul includes Timothy in this expression. So both of these spiritual leaders regularly gave thanks and prayed for the people in Colossae.

This passage contains basic truths about the Christian life, and these truths are important to everyone. Paul begins by commending the Colossians for their faith and love and by thanking God, the source of these qualities. The Colossians showed not only faith in Christ but also love for each other—a natural result of faith in Christ, whose actions always flow from love.

Talk about hope with your group. To most people in our culture, the concept of hope refers to wishful thinking, implying a lack of certainty. But here Paul is clearly talking about a sure thing. Biblical hope is based on God’s promises, and it is tied with the belief and assurance that those promises are true. People who believe in Christ know that there is an assurance of eternal life, and there is much more to this hope than personal security and blessings.

If it will be helpful with your group, explore how the hope of eternal life with God in his kingdom makes life on earth different for believers. How do we live differently? How do we treat others differently? Hope leads us to the opposite of the perspective that says, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” Following Christ’s call to spread the good news and good work of God’s kingdom, we can serve others and seek to make this life the best it can be for them and for us (see Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 2:8-10). You may want to discuss with your group the teaching throughout Scripture that God will bring about a new creation: a new heaven and earth where there is no sorrow, pain, or death. It will be a “coming

home” for God’s children, bringing complete fellowship with God forever. The promises in John 14:1-3 and Revelation 21:1-7 may be helpful to include in your discussion.

*b. What does Paul say about the gospel?*

- **Why is it called “the true message”?**
- **What is the result of hearing and receiving the gospel?**
- **Explain what it might mean to bear fruit.**

It will be helpful to explore what the gospel is. Consult the glossary with your group members, and ask them to add their own impressions. The gospel, which means “good news,” reveals the grace we have been given by God through the saving work of Jesus Christ. In the church at Colossae, people had been hearing the message of the gospel. As a result, they were living differently than before they had heard this message. Now, because of their faith in Christ, they were empowered by God’s Spirit to express love for one another, and they were sharing this message and God’s love with others. In this way the gospel was “bearing fruit and growing.” To illustrate fruit-bearing in the Christian life, point your group briefly to Paul’s words about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 (see also Col. 3:12-14).

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### **3. Colossians 1:7-8**

On the basis of Paul’s comments in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12-13, it is likely that Epaphras was from the region around Colossae and that he founded not only the church there but also churches in the neighboring communities of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

*How does Paul describe Epaphras and what he has done for the people in Colossae?*

- **What does it mean to be a fellow servant?**
- **What had Epaphras told Paul about the Colossians?**

Though Paul had apparently not visited Colossae, he names Epaphras as the person who taught the people there “the true message of the gospel” (1:6). Paul also makes clear that he and Epaphras worked together and that Epaphras ministered faithfully to see that the people in Colossae



continued to follow what they were first taught. By calling Epaphras his “fellow servant,” Paul puts his stamp of approval on Epaphras as a ministry leader and also on the message he brought to the Colossians.

Apparently Epaphras had been in touch with Paul, either by letter or in person, and had given Paul a glowing account of the Colossians’ faith and love.

- **What does it mean that the people had “love in the Spirit”?**

The love that the Colossians had was no ordinary love. It was the love that comes from God through the Holy Spirit working in their lives to transform them, making them more like Christ (see 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Col. 3:9-17).

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#### **4. Colossians 1:9**

*Why has Paul prayed for the people in Colossae, and what is the content of his prayer?*

- **How frequently did Paul and the others pray? What does this tell us about them?**
- **What does it mean to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will?**
- **How would the people receive wisdom and understanding?**

Paul indicates his interest and love for the Colossian church because his prayers for them were not occasional but ongoing. Having heard of the Colossians’ faith and love, Paul knew that the Holy Spirit had helped them to understand the gospel. What was happening in Colossae was the work of the Spirit, so Paul encouraged them to continue with the help of that same Spirit to grow in their knowledge of God’s will. The emphasis is not on what the Colossians would do but on God, who would give wisdom and understanding through the Spirit. Philippians 1:6 may be a helpful reference in your discussion about this.

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#### **5. Colossians 1:10-12**

*a. If God granted Paul’s requests, how would this be evident in the lives of the Colossians?*

- **What does it mean to live “a life worthy of the Lord”?**

- **What actions does Paul list as he describes this life?**

In discussing what it means to live “a life worthy of the Lord,” it may be easier to ask what living such a life does *not* mean. It does not mean that we will be perfect or that we must maintain a certain standard of behavior to be considered worthy by God. Even while we follow Christ, we still sin, but there is forgiveness, and Christ’s righteousness is applied to our lives. A “life worthy of the Lord” is a life motivated by the desire to be like Christ and to “please him in every way” out of gratitude for all he has done for us.

Some translations say “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.” If this comes up in your discussion of the passage, you might mention that in the original text the Greek word here actually means “walk,” but many translators have used the implied meaning of “live.” You might ask what the verb “walk” communicates. The Christian life is a movement in the direction of Christlike living, and it does not emphasize looking at ourselves and our efforts but rather looking to Christ to give us the strength to move forward.

Encourage your group to pick out the verb phrases that characterize a life pleasing to God: “bearing fruit,” “growing in the knowledge of God,” “being strengthened,” and “giving joyful thanks.”

Again you might want to explore the meaning of “bearing fruit.” Ask questions about tending an orchard or growing a garden. Discuss the work of preparing the ground, planting, cultivating, watering, grafting, and pruning. How would a gardener feel if, after all that effort, no fruit appeared? How are good works like fruit that appears as the result of God’s presence in a person’s heart and life? The good works of people who follow Christ result from the knowledge of God’s will combined with the desire to please God and honor the name of Christ. The ability and desire to bear fruit results from the Holy Spirit’s planting, pruning, and watering in the life and heart of the believer.

How can one grow in the knowledge of God? One answer is through a careful study of the Bible, the Word of God. The Bible reveals God to us and is a history of how God has revealed himself to humankind. By reading, studying, and applying the Word, we grow in our knowledge of God. If it seems appropriate, invite your group to look up some passages that provide more information about how we grow in our knowledge of God. In 2 Timothy 3:14-17 we see how we gain the knowledge of God through

Scripture and through family members and teachers in the community of God's people. John 14:6-11 explains that we learn about God through Jesus' words and life. Romans 1:20 indicates how we learn about God through creation, and 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 reveals that we learn about God and are gradually transformed through the work of his Spirit in us.

*b. What does being strengthened by God's power enable us to do?*

- **Explain what the phases “all power” and “glorious might” suggest.**
- **Why are “great endurance and patience” needed?**

Verse 11 indicates that we are strengthened, but in essence it is God's strength working in us. God is the one who has the power to help us do what is impossible in our own strength. It is God's power that saves us and helps us to become people who exemplify the qualities of endurance and patience, particularly in times of hardship. Paul knows from experience that God's strength is always sufficient, even in the most trying of circumstances. Philippians 4:11-13 might be a helpful reference to share with your group. What can we learn from Paul's example?

*c. For what should the Father receive joyful thanks?*

- **What is an inheritance?**
- **How are people qualified to share in the inheritance of God's people?**
- **What does the phrase “kingdom of light” imply?**

Explore the idea of being qualified to share in an inheritance. An inheritance is usually given because of a family relationship. We have been adopted into God's family. This has happened not because of our own merit but because of God's love shown through Christ's death on the cross. All who accept his death as a substitute for the punishment they deserve because of their sin are now “qualified” to share in what God has prepared for those who love him. Because of Christ's death, we inherit eternal life right now and for the life to come.

Refer back to your discussion about “holy people” in verse 2 in case there are still questions about what it means to be holy or to be a saint.

In discussing “the kingdom of light,” you might ask what comes to mind when we think of *light*. Members of your group might say that *light* reminds them of things like wisdom, goodness, humility, justice, fairness, and purity. “The kingdom of light” is the kingdom of God, and although we don’t always discern it, it includes the world we live in—and indeed the whole universe. Because of Christ, God helps us to expand his kingdom of light into the dark areas of our lives and into the dark world around us, which struggles and suffers from the effects of sin (see Rom. 8:19-23).

## **6. Colossians 1:13-14**

a. *From what have we been rescued?*

- **What is “the dominion of darkness”?**
- **What is “the kingdom of the Son”?**

Spend a few moments discussing “the dominion of darkness” and how it contrasts with the kingdom of light. The “dominion of darkness” can be more literally translated as “the power [or authority, or tyranny] of darkness.” Before our deliverance in Christ, we were under this power in our slavery to sin (John 8:34-36), controlled by our sinful thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

Compare that with the “kingdom of the Son” by asking for some words that describe Christ’s kingdom. Invite group members to look back in the text you have covered so far. From earlier parts of the lesson discussion, group members will probably think of love, faithfulness, truth, hope, wisdom, fruitbearing, patience, and joy—as well as forgiveness, humility, peace, and more.

b. *Review how redemption and the forgiveness of our sins has been accomplished for us.*

- **What is redemption?**
- **What was the payment for our redemption?**

“Redemption” refers to purchasing back something that has been held in bond or debt, or pawned, or mortgaged. In the Bible this concept has its roots in ancient culture, where it could apply to persons who sold themselves into servitude or slavery (often temporarily) because they had no other way to pay a debt. After serving for an agreed length of

time, or if someone else redeemed (ransomed) them by paying the debt for them, the debt was forgiven (see Lev. 25:35-55). In Colossians 1:14 the apostle Paul is referring to the redemption payment that Christ gave to free us from our debt of sin. Because he paid this debt with his own life by dying in our place, our sins are forgiven.

If you think it would be helpful for your group, ask what being forgiven our sins means for us. The *NIV Application Commentary* explains that “Forgiveness of sins is not simply a liberation from the past; it sets us free for the present and future. It opens the possibility of living a life worthy of the Lord.”

Several questions in this lesson have presented an opportunity to share the gospel message, the good news of salvation in Christ. Be sensitive to your group members as you discuss these closing questions. Listen for the Spirit’s leading as you review the main points of this lesson. If someone in the group seems resistant to the idea of being a sinner or needing redemption, don’t argue. Instead, accept group members wherever they are on their spiritual journey and trust the Spirit to continue working in them.

If you have members in your group who have been raised in the church or have been Christians for a long time, ask them if it is easier to trust in our own moral goodness rather than trusting in Christ. Newcomers should realize that even after we come to faith, we will sin. The difference is that Christ’s death covers our sin, and the Holy Spirit now works in our lives to change us.

## **Taking It Home**

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*Looking back over this lesson, what did you learn? How were you encouraged? How were you challenged?*

Use this question if you think it will be helpful to review the lesson together as you close. Encourage as many group members as possible to briefly share their thoughts.

## **For Further Study**

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Matthew 28:18-20

Ephesians 2:8-10

John 14:1-3

Revelation 21:1-7

Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:12-14

Colossians 4:12-13

Philippians 1:6

2 Timothy 3:14-17

John 14:6-11

Romans 1:20

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Philippians 4:11-13

Romans 8:19-23

Leviticus 25:35-55

In the book of Colossians, a letter written by the apostle Paul in the first century A.D., we discover the wonders of a “mystery that was hidden for ages.” That mystery is Jesus Christ, now revealed for all people to see as the Savior who transforms us and makes us new. He makes it possible for us to have new life forever, the way God intended from the beginning.

In this study we explore with Paul and the Colossians the amazing depths of God’s love for us in Christ, in whom “all things hold together,” so that we can live by that love too, in all our relationships.

*Discover Colossians* features 7 lessons from the letter of Paul to the church in Colossae. Lessons 1-6 focus on the full text of Colossians; lesson 7 (optional) focuses on the gospel message in Colossians. This material is intended for small group Bible study, but it can also be used profitably for personal study. Guides for leaders and group members are available.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). This is an effective and enjoyable way to study God’s Word.

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*CoffeeBreak*



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