



Sterling Study Guide to *Colossians*

How to use this guide

- The main purpose of this guide is to encourage groups to read and discuss Scripture together. It is meant to be life-giving, not a chore. If this becomes a chore, change it or use something different.
- Use what you find helpful, but do not let yourself be bound to the guide. Feel free to expand what you like and to not use what is not helpful for your group. Do not force conversation, but allow it to come naturally. Some parts will speak more to some groups than to others.
- This study has been divided into sections that should be readable in one sitting together. Again, do not be bound to the guide. If you read more or less than what is planned, that is okay. Work at your own pace.
- There are two models of questions provided to guide your conversation. There are **general questions** that can be applied to any text, as well as **text specific questions**. Use what works best for your group, or both.
- Remember to read Scripture in context. It is easy for us to pick and choose what we like and to miss the bigger picture. Be mindful of the difficulty of reading in context especially when we only read short sections at a time.
- Read, listen, share, pray. Allow the Spirit to work.

General Questions (can be asked after each section)

1. Which parts of this text resonated with you? Which parts did you like?
2. Which parts of this text did not resonate with you? Which parts did you not like?
3. Which parts of this text did you not understand? What questions do you have?
4. Which parts of this text teach you something about God?
5. Which parts of this text can you apply in your daily life?

Background to *Colossians*

- *Colossians* is a letter written by Paul from prison to the church in Colossae. It is likely that Paul wrote this letter between 50-62 AD.
- Paul never visited Colossae and was therefore not a part of starting the church. However, people he influenced and worked with (Epaphras and Philemon) were most likely instrumental in spreading the gospel in Colossae.
- The Colossian church was mixed with people from all kinds of backgrounds. One of the problems Paul wanted to deal with was that different philosophies and world-views that were being mixed with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Major Themes

- The Christian life is not hard, it is impossible. The only way that it is made possible is because God invites us to open our lives to welcome Jesus to live in us. Jesus is our hope of glory.
- The most important thing about Christianity is Jesus, not religion (human-made rules, traditions, and institutions).
- The Christian life involves transformation. We are to take off the old self that has been crucified with God and put on the new self in Christ.
- We are to live for God in all we do, because no matter how powerful we may be, we all serve a higher master.
- Jesus is the centre of life, faith, and this letter.

Colossians 1

1

Text Specific Questions

1. How could Paul's prayer for the Colossians serve as a model for how we pray for one another?
2. Jesus is central to Paul's letter to the Colossians. What does it mean that Jesus is the centre of our faith? What does that look like practically when we engage in scripture and discern difficult topics together?
3. Paul is writing to people in a city that has many competing world-views. He is trying to show the difference between other gods and philosophies, and Jesus. How do you think Jesus compares in our pluralistic society? What kinds of conversations could this lead us to with other religions? Check out Acts 17.
4. As easy as it sounds, it is a life changing decision to have Jesus live in your life. What does it look like practically, in every day life, to have Jesus live in us?
5. What parts of your life are you hesitant to give over to God? Into which parts of your life do you not want to let God in? What steps do you want to take to let God in?

Colossians 2

2

Text Specific Questions

1. There are so many different religions, philosophies, world-views, and even differences among Christians. How can we hold true to the gospel of Jesus? How do we distinguish between true and false doctrines? How would you describe the essentials of the Christian faith?
2. What role can/does community have in our discerning about what to believe and not to believe?
3. What are some practical steps you have/can take to continue to live in Christ and allow Christ to live in you on a day-to-day basis?
4. What holds you back from allowing Christ to be your source for life?
5. Describe a time when you became frustrated with religion or Christian institutions. How did you address it? Did anything change?
6. What can we do in our communities to encourage young people and new Christians to peel away our human-made rules and traditions that keep them (and us) from experiencing Jesus?

Colossians 3:1-17

3

Text Specific Questions

1. Reflect on a time when you did something you knew you shouldn't and later regretted. What was your thought process that led to that decision? What about an incident where you showed the kingdom of God to someone around you? Describe the relationship between your thoughts and actions.
2. What can you do to help keep your mind on things of God and His kingdom?
3. What is your identity? Of all the things you are and are about, where does being a child of God fall on your list?
4. Even though it is true that we are given new life in Jesus, it is difficult for us to let go of the guilt and shame and accept God's love for us. How can communities of faith help each other accept the love of God and their new identity in Christ?
5. We can learn and be encouraged so much by stories. What are some of the ways that you have lived out your identity in Christ? What stories of others living out their identity in Christ have been encouraging for you in your own walk?

Text Specific Questions

- 1) Imagine the context of Paul's day. How is what Paul is teaching a radical message in a culture where women and children were not looked on as equal to men, or where slavery was a norm?
- 2) Examine your own relationships at home, church, work, or with friends. Describe the various forms of power you possess. How does being a follower of Jesus determine those relationships and what is expected of you?
- 3) What would life look like if we all went about our days cognizant that we serve a master who is higher and more powerful than anything we are or any master or boss we might have?
- 4) Describe your prayer practice. To what extent is prayer a part of your life? Are you devoted to prayer? Yes, we can pray when things get tough, but what about when things are going well?
- 5) Have you ever been an outsider to a church community? How did the actions (or lack of actions) of the community influence your experience with church and God? What are some practical ways in which we can be people of grace to people outside of the church?