COLOSSIANS
COMPLETE IN CHRIST
Welcome to our study of Colossians, a book that stresses the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. He is our source of the knowledge of God, our access into the presence of God, and our restoration into the image of God. Throughout this book, we will also discover the essential call of the believer to impact his world in a day when empty philosophies and deceptions are prevalent.

The 11 lessons in this packet are designed to walk us through this challenging book of the Bible. During the first lesson (Survey), we will look at the overall message of the book of Colossians. The next nine lessons will focus on studying key passages in detail. Then, in our last lesson (Synthesis), we will summarize what we have learned for future reference.

In studying each passage in detail, we will be learning and using a number of basic Bible study methods. These methods fit under three fundamental skills that are meant to be practiced in order each week - observe, interpret, and apply. These skills are summarized on the next few pages, which are designed as a “Quick Reference Guide” that you can flip back through during your study. There are also advanced Bible study skills in the Appendix for those who want to go deeper in their study.

As you use this packet to study Colossians, please keep in mind a couple of things. There are more questions than you may have time to answer in any given lesson. Focus on the questions that seem most significant to understanding the passage’s meaning. Also, make sure that you don’t skip your own observations of the passage as this is the most important step of Bible study.
Every time we study the Bible, the first thing to ask is, “What do I see?” This is the crucial skill of **observation**, which lays the groundwork for the rest of our study. Here are four tasks involved in observation which should be performed in the order below:

**Observation Task 1:** Mark up the passage by visually identifying the following specific elements:

- **Underline all verbs.** A verb is a word or group of words used to indicate either that an action takes place (“I rejoice”) or that a state or condition exists (“I was made a minister”). Verbs are often the most significant indicators of the author’s flow of thought.

- **Circle key words or phrases.** These are words or short phrases that are important theologically (like “circumcision” in 2:11) or thematically set the theme or main idea for the passage (like “empty deception” in 2:8).

- **Highlight repeated words or phrases.** Include words and phrases that are closely related even if not exact duplicates (such as “philosophy” and “principles of the world”). You’ll want to highlight things repeated in other places (such as “elementary principles” in 2:20).

- **Box connecting words.** These important words indicate the logical connection between words, phrases, and clauses. Here are eight types of common connecting words to look for:
  
  1. **COMPARISON:** either points out similarities between two or more related ideas or simply joins like ideas. Comparison words include: **and, like, as, just as, also, so also, even so** (e.g. “joints AND ligaments” 2:19).

  2. **CONTRAST:** points out dissimilarities between ideas. Contrast words include: **but, rather, yet, however** (e.g. “things which are a mere shadow ... BUT the substance” 2:17).

  3. **PURPOSE:** indicates the intended goal of an idea or action, whether or not it was realized. Purpose words include: **that, so that, in order that** (e.g. “filled with the knowledge of His will ... SO THAT you will walk in a manner worthy” 1:9-10).

  4. **RESULT:** very similar to “purpose,” but indicates the actual consequence, whether or not it was intended. Result words include: **that, so that, as a result, with the result that** (e.g. “I have sent him to you ... THAT you may know about our circumstances” 4:8).

  5. **CAUSE:** expresses the basis or cause of an action. Cause words include: **because, since,** and sometimes **for** (e.g. “Do not lie to one another SINCE you laid aside the old self” 3:9).

  6. **EXPLANATION:** what follows further explains the previous idea, giving reasons why it is true, why it occurred, or simply adding additional information. Look for the key word **for** (e.g. “FOR you have died and your life is hidden with Christ” 3:3).
7. **INFERENCE**: provides a logical consequence, conclusion, or summary to the previous discussion. Inference words include: therefore, for this reason (e.g. “THEREFORE consider the members of your earthly body as dead” 3:5).

8. **CONDITION**: presents a condition that must occur before a certain action or conclusion can occur. The statement may or may not reflect reality (i.e. it could be hypothetical). Key word is if (e.g. “IF he comes to you, welcome him” 4:10).

Observation Task 2: **List 2-3 primary themes you see in the passage each week.**

A primary theme is the big idea, the central truth or command that the passage focuses on, such as “firstborn” in 1:15-23. After reading the passage, write your themes as single words or short phrases. Identifying these themes at the beginning of your study will help you develop a good overall grasp of the passage.

Observation Task 3: **Write two or more observations per verse.**

Our observations might identify people, places, or events, point out repeated words or key terms, record important connections between words and sentences, or even point out something missing that we expected to see.

Observation Task 4: **Record your own interpretive questions.**

Here are a few examples:

**WHO** is...
...Paul talking about?
...accomplishing the action?
...benefiting from the action?

**WHAT** is the...
...meaning of this word?
...significance of this phrase?
...implication of this statement?
...relationship between these phrases?

**WHY** did Paul...
...choose this word?
...include this phrase, statement, or command?
...connect these ideas?
...not say _______?

**HOW**...
...was this action accomplished?
...will this situation occur?
Our observation of a passage should stir interesting yet challenging questions, leading us to the second stage of our Bible study, interpretation. Fortunately, we do not have to run to a commentary or study Bible for answers (though these are helpful tools to check our conclusions). Use the following six methods, as needed, to tackle a variety of questions. Also, make sure to familiarize yourself with the three “Principles of Interpretation” that appear in the Appendix on page 97.

**Interpretation Method 1: Use the context.**

Look for important clues in the sentences and paragraphs that come before and after the verse in question. Try to follow Paul’s flow of thought through the whole chapter. This may take you to the previous lesson, so have it handy as a review. You may need to read ahead in Colossians for clues.

**Interpretation Method 2: Compare multiple translations.**

This packet uses the New American Standard (NASB) translation. You can often find helpful interpretive clues by comparing this translation with other translations. The New King James Version (NKJV), like the NASB, is a fairly word-for-word translation of the Greek text. The New International Version (NIV) and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) are excellent phrase-to-phrase translations of the Greek and are thus often easier to read. Another excellent phrase-to-phrase Bible, which includes extensive translation notes, is the New English Translation (NET) available online for free at www.bible.org. You can find and compare numerous translations of any Bible passage at www.biblestudytools.com.

**Interpretation Method 3: Look up key words.**

While looking up a key word in English is helpful, doing so in Greek is far better and is surprisingly easy, thanks to the internet. Simply log onto www.biblestudytools.com, and as an example, type in “Colossians 2” in the “search for:” box, set the “using:” box to “NAS with Strong’s Numbers” and click “Find.” All of Colossians 2 will appear on the screen with most of the words highlighted in blue. Clicking on any of these will bring up a new screen that will explain the Greek word used here, its possible definitions, and the total number of times it is used in each book of the New Testament (NT). Click on any of the other NT books (under the title “NAS Verse Count”) and get a display of every verse in that book that uses this Greek word.
Interpretation Method 4: **Study cross-references (Xrefs).**

XRefs are simply other passages in the Bible that are somehow related to the verses you are studying. They often prove incredibly helpful as we seek to understand our passage. You can find a few XRefs in the margins of most Bibles, but you can find many more by logging onto another helpful website: net.bible.org. In the top left of the screen under “Display Bible,” choose “Colossians,” then the chapter you are interested in, and then click “Go.” A new screen will appear with the NET Bible translation of the chapter you requested. Click the “XRef” tab at the top of the screen, and this will take you to an extensive list of XRefs for every verse in this chapter based on the classic book *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. Clicking any of these will bring up the single verse, but you can then click “context” to see the verse in the midst of its surrounding context.

Interpretation Method 5: **Look up background information.**

You can find helpful insights by looking up confusing names or words in a Bible dictionary or by looking up the particular verses you are studying in a background commentary. One of the best dictionaries is *The New Bible Dictionary* by Wood & Marshall, but you can also find the older *Int’l Standard Bible Dictionary [ISBE]* online for free (net.bible.org/dictionary.php). *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* by Craig Keener is an excellent example of a verse-by-verse background commentary.

Interpretation Method 6: **Tackle tough questions step-by-step.**

When trying to answer the most challenging questions, follow this four-step process: **(1) LIST ALL THE OPTIONS.** Always start by brainstorming every possible answer to your question. **(2) LIST PROS AND CONS FOR EACH OPTION.** See all the evidence you can find that either argues for or against a particular option. This evidence comes from your study of key words, the grammar of the sentence, the context of surrounding verses and the book as a whole, cross references to other books, and comparison with your overall understanding of Christian theology. **(3) CHOOSE THE MOST LIKELY OPTION.** Look at your evidence for each option. Typically, evidence from the immediate context is most important, followed closely by evidence from the book as a whole. Evidence from other books of the Bible, or from Christian theology as a whole, does not carry quite as much weight unless the solution contradicts a clear passage elsewhere or a major tenant of Christian doctrine. In that case, since Scripture never lies and God cannot contradict Himself, you must eliminate that option. **(4) DECIDE ON YOUR CERTAINTY LEVEL.** Once you have chosen the best solution, step back for a second and humbly gauge how certain you are of its accuracy (90% = I am very sure this is correct ... 60% = This solution is just a bit more likely than the others!). Finally, talk with others and check commentaries or reference books to see what solutions they have chosen and why.
Our Bible study is not over until we apply what we have learned to our everyday lives. And lest we underestimate the value of this last step, remember that in God’s eyes it is the person who does not just know His Word, but also obeys His Word that truly loves Him (See John 14:21). So how do we apply a passage to our lives? Application involves the following two tasks:

Application Task 1: List potential principles from your passage.

A “principle” is simply a fact or command stated or implied in a particular passage that is practically relevant to our lives. Legitimate principles are not specific to a particular person (e.g. 1 Timothy 5:23 is just for Timothy) nor a particular time (e.g. “do not leave Jerusalem” in Acts 1:4). An example from Colossians 1 would be, “We can find hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Colossians 1:5). It is often helpful when listing principles to consider the following questions:

- Is there something to worship or thank God for?
- Is there a promise for me to claim or a truth for me to believe?
- Is there something I am convicted about that I need to change or begin doing?
- Is there something or someone I need to pray for specifically this week?
- Is there any relationship I need to work on?

Application Task 2: Choose one principle, and create a plan to apply it to your life this week.

Once you complete your principle list, prayerfully choose the one principle you most need to work on (Do not just choose the easiest to apply!). If you felt deeply convicted about one in particular, that is probably the principle God is leading you to apply. Once you have chosen a specific principle, answer these two questions:

- What exactly will I do differently this week to apply this principle to my life (Be specific)?
- Whom, other than the Lord, will I ask to help me follow through with this application?
See the Big Picture
COLOSSIANS SURVEY
Surveying a book like Colossians allows you to grasp the big picture and the overall storyline of the book before getting caught up in the details. This survey provides a helpful road map to guide your study during the coming weeks. Begin this crucial first step by taking the next thirty minutes to read straight through Colossians without stopping. Then, answer the questions below before moving on to the next page.

1. How would you describe Paul’s audience? Are they believers or unbelievers? Are they spiritually mature or immature? What issues are they facing?

2. What are the major themes or big ideas in this book? (Hint: Look for repeated words and ideas.)

3. Now that you have read through the entire book, what are Paul’s purposes in writing it? Be as specific as you can.

4. Based only on Colossians, how does Paul establish the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ? What are the practical ramifications of such a view of Christ?

Pray

Begin this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of His Word, and asking for His Spirit to guide your study.
Once you have completed the introductory questions on the previous page, read this background article on the book of Colossians (portions have been compiled from The Bible Knowledge Commentary and The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia).

AUTHORSHIP

The Pauline authorship of Colossians is supported by abundant evidence both in and out of the book. Colossians has three personal references to Paul in the first person (1:1; 1:23; 4:18) and numerous references to Paul’s associates, such as Tychicus (4:7), Onesimus (4:9), Aristarchus (4:10), Mark (4:10), Justus (4:11), Epaphras (4:12), Luke (4:14), Demas (4:14), and Archippus (4:17). The style and content of Colossians is similar to Ephesians, written about the same time and probably alluded to as “the letter from Laodicea” (4:16).

While 34 Greek words are unique to Colossians, they are characteristic of the theme of the book and fit the thoughts of Paul. Words in this category include “visible” (1:16), “supremacy” (1:18), “fill up” (1:24), “philosophy” (2:8), and “Deity” (2:9).

The conclusion of Ephesians confirms that Tychicus was the carrier of both it and Colossians (Eph. 6:21; cf. Col. 4:7). This helps confirm Paul as the author of the Colossian epistle. The external evidence for Paul’s authorship is strong, despite the claim of some that the heresy combated in the book is second-century Gnosticism. But there is good reason to believe that the heresy addressed in Colossians (at least in its incipient form) had appeared already in Paul’s lifetime. And in view of Paul’s other encounters with heresies, in books which are unquestionably his, it seems clear that he authored Colossians (cf. 1 Cor. 15; Gal. 1-2; 2 Thes. 2).

COLOSSAE

Colossae was a city of Phrygia on the Lycus River, one of the branches of the Maeander, and 3 miles from Mt. Cadmus, 8,013 ft. high and stood at the head of a gorge where the two streams unite and on the great highway traversing the country from Ephesus to the Euphrates valley, 13 miles from Hierapolis and 10 from Laodicea. Its history is chiefly associated with that of these two cities. Early, according to both Herodotus and Xenophon, it was a place of great importance. There Xerxes stopped 481 BC (Herodotus vii. 30) and Cyrus the Younger marched 401 BC (Xen. Anab. i. 2,6). From Col 2:1 it is not likely that Paul visited the place in person; but its Christianization was due to the efforts of Epaphras and Timothy (Col 1:1,7), and it was the home of Philemon and Epaphras. That a church was established there early is evident from Col 4:12-13; Rev 1:11; 3:14. As the neighboring cities, Hierapolis and Laodicea, increased in importance, Colossae declined. There were many Jews living there, and a chief article of commerce, for which the place was renowned, was the colossinus, a peculiar wool, probably of a purple color. In religion the people were especially lax, worshipping angels. Of them, Michael was the chief and the protecting saint of the city. It is said that once he appeared to the people, saving the city in time of a flood. It was this belief in angels that called forth Paul’s epistle (Col 2:18). During the 7th and 8th centuries the place was overrun by the Saracens; in the 12th century the church was destroyed by the Turks and the city disappeared. Its site was explored by Mr. Hamilton. The ruins of the church, the stone foundation of a large theater, and a necropolis with stones of a peculiar shape are still to be seen. During the Middle Ages the place bore the name of Chonae; it is now called Chonas.
DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

Colossians was written from Rome during Paul’s (first) imprisonment there as recorded in Acts 28:30. At the same time, Paul wrote Ephesians and Philemon (ca. A.D. 60-62). In Philemon 1:9, Paul referred to himself as “a prisoner of Christ Jesus.” Ephesians also contains references to Paul’s being a “prisoner” (Eph. 3:1; 4:1). And Ephesians refers to Tychicus’ carrying the epistles from Paul to their destinations (Eph. 6:21; cf. Col. 4:7). Since the record of Acts ends around A.D. 60-62, Colossians was probably written during this two-year imprisonment. And since neither Colossians, Ephesians, nor Philemon mention the outcome of Paul’s trial, anticipated in Philippians 1:19-21, it can be assumed that Colossians was written before Philippians.

PURPOSE

The circumstance that prompted the writing of Colossians seemed to be the special heresy that arose there. This false teaching seemed to be the beginning of what later (in the second century) developed into Gnosticism. It contained several characteristics. (1) It was Jewish, stressing the need for observing Old Testament laws and ceremonies. (2) It was philosophical, laying emphasis on some special or deeper knowledge. (3) It involved the worship of angels as mediators to God (2:18). (4) It was exclusivistic, stressing the special privilege and “perfection” of those select few who belonged to this philosophical elite. (5) It was also Christological. But this seminal Gnosticism denied the deity of Christ, thus calling forth one of the greatest declarations of Christ’s deity found anywhere in Scripture (1:15-16; 2:9).

Three purposes seem to have been in Paul’s mind as he wrote Colossians. First, he sought to show the deity and supremacy of Christ in the face of the Colossian heresy (1:18; 2:9). Second, he wanted to lead believers into spiritual maturity (1:28; 2:6-7). Third, he wanted to inform them about his state of affairs and to elicit their prayers on his behalf (4:2-8).
Having read the background article on the book, now skim through Colossians one more time and create your own title for each of the major sections below (you can divide these into smaller sections, each with its own title, if you wish). Try not to use the titles in this packet or in your Bible. Create your own titles that capture your understanding of the main idea of each section.

My Colossians Outline...

- 1:1-8
- 1:9-14
- 1:15-23
- 1:24-2:5
- 2:6-15
- 2:16-23
- 3:1-11
- 3:12-4:1
- 4:2-18

End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.
A survey performed in the 1980s by National Geographic discovered that 1 in 4 Americans could not locate the Soviet Union or the Pacific Ocean on a map. As a result, Brøderbund software programmers created a game called *Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?* for the Apple computer. It would later become a TV game show craze for kids in the 1990s, educating the player on international geography and history. It truly was ingenious since countless numbers of kids purchased the game or viewed it on TV. It might have helped that Carmen San Diego insulted the pride of kid contestants as they tried to catch her and end her international crime spree. Kids became so determined to catch her that they willingly endured however much education might have occurred to see her behind bars!

Today, we have become so much more familiar with international geography and history. Yet, we are still unaware of how the gospel of Jesus Christ has reached and transformed cultures and countries around this global world.

> How has the gospel of Jesus Christ impacted your life? When did you first hear it and from whom?

> How would you describe the gospel’s movement through centuries and cultures to today?
Every time we study the Bible, the first thing to ask is, “What do I see?” This is the crucial skill of observation, and it lays the groundwork for the rest of our study. We will learn a new observation skill each week to practice along with the others we have already learned. This week, simply read the passage below, and then write one or two observations for each verse in the box that follows. Our observations might identify people, places, or events, point out repeated words or key terms, record important connections between words and sentences, or even point out something missing that we expected to see. The first few have been done for you.

**Colossians 1:1-8**

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel 6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8 and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.
Themes

List out any themes or big ideas you see in this passage.

My observations

vv 1-2
- Paul introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ
- The faith, love, and hope of these Colossian believers causes Paul to give thanks and to pray
- The gospel is constantly bearing fruit and increasing in our world

vv 3-4

vv 5-6

vv 7-8
Our observation of Colossians 1:1-8 should have stirred up interesting questions like, “What is an apostle?” How do we answer such a challenging question? Fortunately, we do not have to run to a commentary or study Bible for the answer (though these are helpful tools to check our conclusions)! God desires that all of us become approved workmen, “accurately handling the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). To that end, **we will learn a new interpretive skill each week** to practice along with the others we have already learned. This week’s skill is the most important - **USE THE CONTEXT**. Look for important clues in the sentences and paragraphs that come before and after the verse in question. Try to follow Paul’s flow of thought through the whole chapter. This may take you to the previous lesson, so have it handy as a review. You may also need to read ahead in Colossians for clues.

1. What key themes does Paul introduce at the beginning of this letter? Do any of these themes correspond to the themes for the book you discovered during your survey in the previous lesson?

2. What is the basic meaning of the title “apostle” (Gal 1:1)? What qualifications did an apostle need (1 Cor 9:1-2, 12:28-30)? What were the responsibilities of an apostle (2 Cor 12:12; Eph 2:19-22, 3:1-7)? Should we be looking for apostles like Paul to lead us today? Why or why not?

3. What is the relationship between faith, love, and hope in verses 4 and 5? How do they fit together? Why is each so essential to the spiritual life? If one is weak, how are the other two affected? (See 1 Cor 13:13 and Eph 1:15-18.)
4. The word *gospel* simply means “good news.” What particular good news are Paul and Timothy speaking of in 1:5? (See Romans 1:16-17, 1 Corinthians 15:1-6, and 2 Tim 2:8.) Why is this message such good news?

5. Describe the movement of the gospel in 1:6. What terms does Paul use to describe its movement? What places have seen its fruit?

6. What does “bond-servant” mean? (See Rom 1:1; 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 1:10; Phil 2:7.) Why was it such a fitting description for Epaphras and such a favorite self-description of Paul in his letters (See Col 4:12)?

My summary
In one sentence, use your own words to describe the main point that Paul communicates in this passage.
In God’s eyes it is the person who does not just know His Word, but also obeys His Word who truly loves Him (John 14:21). Our Bible study is only complete once we apply what we’ve learned. To that end, we will learn the first two steps in the process of application this week. **First**, start each lesson by answering a few reflection questions designed to demonstrate how each passage relates to our own lives. **Second**, step back and look at the passage as a whole and list potential principles. A “principle” is simply a fact or command stated or implied in a particular passage that is practically relevant to our lives. Legitimate principles are not specific to a particular person (e.g. 1 Timothy 5:23 is just for Timothy) nor a particular time (e.g. “do not leave Jerusalem” in Acts 1:4). A couple of examples are provided for you on the next page.

The Colossian believers were characterized by faith, love, and hope as the gospel had left such a clear mark upon them. Do you see your own identity and purpose in life so tied to the gospel of Jesus as Paul and his coworker, Epaphras, who referred to themselves as “bond-servants” and “apostles” for the gospel of Jesus?

How do you hope the gospel changes you through this study? How do you hope others characterize you? What will need to change in your life to build such a reputation? Who will hold you accountable for these changes?
End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.

List principles

List at least five principles from Colossians 1:1-8. (Remember, a principle is simply a fact or command stated or implied in the passage that is relevant to your own life.)

1. We can give thanks and pray for one another in light of each other’s faith, love, & hope.

2. We can find hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. 

4. 

5. 

Pray
The Knowledge of His Will

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14
Annie arrived in the Far East a few days ago, hoping to share the gospel with university students. After meeting quite a few around campus, she connected with one in particular and looked forward to sharing lunch with her today. They met at the bus stop near the campus entrance and began walking towards her friend’s favorite nearby restaurant. Annie was so excited to be able to walk into a restaurant with someone who could actually read the menu and order without playing charades as she had done the last few days. And man did her friend order! There was enough food on the table to feed a small army. After an hour of eating and chatting, Annie felt a bit guilty to see how much food she had left uneaten. Her guilt was only compounded when she saw her friend take out money to pay for the meal. She knew the bill would far exceed what money the girl could afford to spend on a meal. There was no way Annie was going to allow this new, precious friend to foot the entire bill. So she began to pull money out of her purse and persistently push it on her friend. Annie’s guilt soon turned to dismay as her friend seemed more and more offended by Annie’s attempts to pay. Eventually, she allowed Annie to pay for her half of the meal, but as they left the restaurant to return to campus, Annie’s friend seemed distant and their conversation was tense and forced.

Annie didn’t realize that she had just broken a cultural norm and had actually shamed her friend. While Americans are accustomed to dividing the cost of meals, Annie was now living in a culture that considered it a privilege and honor to pay for the meal of guests and new friends. Annie’s lack of knowledge regarding the desire of her friend had prevented her from honoring her friend and even being able to deepen their relationship. In a similar way, our relationship with God will suffer if we don’t grow in our understanding of His desires and His will.

Why does this matter?

How can you come to know the will of God (what He desires for you)?

If you knew the will of God, how would it impact your decisions, motives, and direction in life?
Colossians 1:9-14

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
Last week we learned to use the context to help us answer our interpretive questions. This week, we will add our second interpretive skill - **STUDY CROSS REFERENCES (XRefs)**. XRefs are simply other passages in any book of the Bible that are somehow related to the verses you are studying. They often prove incredibly helpful as you seek to understand your passage. A few such XRefs can be found in the margins of most English Bibles, but more can be found by logging onto another helpful website: [net.bible.org](http://net.bible.org). In the top left of the screen under “Display Bible,” choose “Colossians” and then “1” and click “Go.” A new screen will appear with the NET Bible translation of Colossians 1. Click the “XRef” tab at the top of the screen, and this will take you to an extensive list of XRefs for every verse in this chapter based on the book *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. Clicking any of these will bring up the single verse, but you can then click “context” to see the verse in the midst of its surrounding context. This is a great tool for answering tough questions!

1. Create and answer any two of your own interpretive questions from this passage:
   a) 
   
   b) 

2. How does this passage fit with the previous one? (Hint: Identify “the reason” in 1:9.)

3. What is the relationship between knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (cf. Prov 1:1-7; 1 Cor 1:21-23; 2:6-16)? Who provides them (cf. Col 2:2-3)? What should they produce (cf. Col 2:20-23; 3:16; Rom 12:2; James 3:13-17)?
4. In what ways does Paul characterize a walk “worthy of the Lord” in this passage?

5. Why does Paul highlight “steadfastness and patience” as the 2 specific attributes produced by the glorious might of His power in us?

6. For what “inheritance” are we to be thankful? How does it relate to the redemption provided to us in 1:14? (See also Col 3:24; Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:13-14.)

7. What has the Father and the Son each done so that we can walk as characterized by this passage? (See also Acts 26:18; Rom 8:2-4; Ephesians 1:19-20.)

My summary

In one sentence, use your own words to describe the main point that Paul communicates in this passage.
If we are to please God “in all respects,” then which areas of your life would not be pleasing to Him? What needs to change so that those areas of your life are realigned to His will and desire?

Are you trying to please God and do good works in your own strength? How can you depend on His Spirit this week in a new way?

As in the previous lesson, complete the reflection questions, and then list a few principles you learned from the passage. This week, we add a third application step - choose one principle, and create a plan to apply it to your life this week. Once you have completed your principle list, prayerfully choose the one principle you most need to work on (do not just choose the easiest to apply). If you felt deeply convicted about one in particular, that is probably the one God is leading you to apply! Once you have chosen a specific principle, follow the directions on the next page to develop a realistic and specific plan to apply it to your life.
List at least five principles from Colossians 1:9-14. (Remember, a principle is simply a fact or command stated or implied in the passage that is relevant to your own life.)

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Apply one this week

Circle the one principle above you will seek to apply this week. Now create a plan to apply this principle by answering these two questions:

- What exactly will you do differently this week to apply this principle to your life? *Be specific.*

- Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?

Pray

End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.
The Supremacy of Christ

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23
Gary's plan for a lazy Sunday afternoon on the couch watching football was suddenly interrupted by a loud knock at the door. He got up and looked through the peep hole to discover 2 well-dressed individuals carrying Bibles. They introduced themselves as Charlie and Sam and politely asked if they could come in and talk about God's good news. After taking a seat on the couch, they began to talk with Gary about the person of Jesus Christ. They described Jesus Christ as God's “only begotten Son” and the “firstborn” of His creation. In fact, Jesus was God's first act of creation. Since Gary grew up in church, much of what he was hearing sounded familiar, yet something seemed off. Eventually, Gary thanked them for coming and showed them out. As he sat back down to watch football, he kept wrestling with their conversation, trying to determine why it didn't sit right with him ...

Gary didn’t realize it, but he'd just been visited by a pair of Jehovah Witnesses who held to a view of the person and work of Jesus Christ that was completely different than what he had been taught growing up in church.

How would you respond to the claim of a Jehovah’s Witness that Jesus Christ is a created being?

Why is such an argument so damaging to the Christian faith and our belief about Jesus’ person and work? Does it really matter at all?
Like last week, read the passage below and write down your observations and questions in the box on the following page. You have probably noticed the “Themes” section that precedes the box for your observations each week. This is our third observational skill - list out 2-3 primary themes you see in the passage each week. A primary theme is a central idea, truth, or command that the passage focuses on, such as “firstborn” in 1:15-23.

Colossians 1:15-23

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach - 23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.
1. Create and answer any two of your own interpretive questions from this passage:
   a) 
   b) 

2. What does it mean that Jesus is the “image” of God? (See Gen 1:26-27; Rom 1:22-23; 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10.) In what ways does He uniquely display the character and activity of “the invisible God” according to this passage? (See also Heb 1:1-3, John 1:18.)

3. Answer a few questions about Paul’s description of Christ as the “firstborn” in verses 15 and 18...
   What range of meanings can this word have (See Lk 2:7; Heb 11:28; 12:22-23; Ps 89:27; Rom 8:29)?

   What is the likeliest meaning of the word in this passage considering the surrounding context?

   Paul’s description of Christ as “firstborn” both in 1:15 and 1:18 marks 2 different sections in this passage. How does Paul’s description of Christ change from 1:15-18a to 1:18b-20?
4. Use verses 20-23 to answer the following questions about reconciliation...

What is it?

Why is it needed?

How was it made possible?

Who will enjoy it? (See also Romans 8:20-21.)

When will it be finally accomplished?

5. Explain the “if” statement of verse 23 in your own words. In particular, what is at stake by our continuance in the faith? Does our continued growth determine whether we are presented to Christ as saved or how Christ evaluates us at our inevitable presentation to Him? (See also 1 Cor 3:10-15; 1 John 2:27-28; 2 Tim 2:10-13, 15.)

6. In what ways does Paul establish both the deity and humanity of Jesus in this passage? What happens if you deny one or the other?

My summary

In one sentence, use your own words to describe the main point that Paul communicates in this passage.
This week’s application section involves the same three steps as last week’s, which we will continue to use throughout our study: **reflect on your own life, list at least five principles, and choose one to apply this week.** It is often helpful when working through the second and third steps to consider the following list of questions:

- Is there something to worship or thank God for?
- Is there a promise for me to claim or a truth for me to believe?
- Is there something I am convicted about that I need to change or begin doing?
- Is there something or someone I need to pray for specifically this week?
- Is there any relationship I need to work on?

Reflect on your life

Now that you have studied this passage, how would you respond to the Jehovah’s Witness who in our case study claims there was a time that Jesus did not exist since He was the “firstborn of all creation”? 

What truths about Christ do you want to remember when sharing the gospel?
List principles

List at least five principles from Colossians 1:15-23. (Remember, a principle is simply a fact or command stated or implied in the passage that is relevant to your own life.)

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Apply one this week

Circle the one principle above you will seek to apply this week. Now create a plan to apply this principle by answering these two questions:

➡️ What exactly will you do differently this week to apply this principle to your life? 
   Be specific.

➡️ Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?

Pray

End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.
The Labor of Ministry

COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:5
Pray

Memorize

Colossians 1:28 | Write it out to get your memorization started.

Why does this matter?

Ace and Prissy are from a predominately Muslim country in Central Asia. As a newly married 18 year old, Prissy first heard about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ from a western woman living in her city. Prissy promptly dismissed the notion of allowing someone else to take the penalty for her sin, but as she got to know this westerner, she slowly came to respect her and eventually decided to put her own faith in Jesus Christ. Prissy’s husband was furious and had every right to beat her, divorce her, or at least mar her reputation. Yet after a year of praying for him, Prissy saw Ace put his faith in Jesus Christ.

Since then Ace and Prissy have been forced to leave their hometown because no one would allow Ace to work for them. They have identified themselves as followers of Christ. Despite the trials, they have moved to the capital of their country and have started an underground home church. As a result, the government has attempted to scare them and their congregation many times. They have followed members to their meetings and arrested them, beaten them, and even kicked some of their university students out of school. Ace and Prissy’s house has been broken into numerous times, and Prissy has even been sexually assaulted in her own home. Central Asian banks can’t be trusted, so they keep all of their money in a safe at home. Just last year 3 men in masks came in and tied up Prissy who was 7 months pregnant in order to rob her and Ace. Because the things that were stolen contained information that incriminates Ace and Prissy in their ministry, they have been forced to flee their country with their 4 children. Despite all these things, Ace and Prissy stand strong on the solid Rock who is their Savior. Prissy even says, “Persecution, if God allows you to go through it, is an honor…”

Why do you think God allows you to suffer or endure difficulties? What might He want to accomplish in you or through you?

What cost are you paying right now so that others can know Jesus and grow in Him?
As in previous weeks, read the passage below and write down your observations, questions, and themes on the following page. This week, we will begin to **underline all of the verbs**. Quick review: a verb is a word or group of words used to indicate either that an action is taking place ("I rejoice") or that a state or condition exists ("I was made a minister"). Because verbs express the action of the passage, they are often the most significant indicators of the author’s flow of thought within the passage.

**Colossians 1:24-2:5**

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. 5 For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.
Themes

List out any themes or big ideas you see in this passage.

My observations

vv 24-26

vv 27-29

vv 1-3

vv 4-5
1. Create and answer any two of your own interpretive questions from this passage:
   a) 
   b) 

2. How does 1:24-2:5 relate to 1:15-23? (Hint: Notice the change of subject from “you” in 1:15-23 to “I” here.)

3. Answer the following questions about Paul’s role as a minister from this passage...
   Why does Paul refer to his role as a “stewardship” in 1:25? (See Luke 16:2-4; 1 Cor 9:17; Eph 3:2.)

   What were the responsibilities of his role as a minister?

   What was the goal or purpose of these responsibilities?

   What resources had God provided to carry out these responsibilities?
4. What was lacking in Christ’s afflictions that Paul was filling up? (See 2 Cor 1:3-7; 4:7-18; Phil 1:12-14; 2 Tim 2:8-10.) In contrast, what was NOT lacking in Christ’s afflictions? (See Heb 7:27; 9:12, 28; 10:10.)

5. Answer the following questions about the “mystery” in 1:25-27 and 2:2...
   How does Paul define any “mystery” in Eph 3:4-5?

   What other mysteries are revealed in the NT (Eph 3:1-12; Eph 5:22-32; 1 Cor 15:50-58)?

   What specific “mystery” did Paul refer to in this passage (cf. Rom 8:10; Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17)?

   What are the similarities and distinctions between all these mysteries?

6. What does it mean to strive according to Christ’s power in verse 29? (See 2 Cor 12:7-10; Eph 1:18-21; Phil 4:11-13.) How do we practically depend on the strength of the Lord?

7. Why is it significant that Paul declares in 2:3 “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Christ? (Hint: Keep reading to the end of section.)

My summary
In one sentence, use your own words to describe the main point that Paul communicates in this passage.
Are you fully carrying out the preaching of the word of God toward a ministry of reconciliation?

In what ways are you participating in seeing every person presented complete in Christ?

What wisdom and knowledge do you treasure? How does the Word of God relate to our various pursuits of knowledge and wisdom? How does your time in the Word reveal the extent to which you treasure it?

As always, reflect on your own life, list at least five principles, and choose one to apply this week. Here is that helpful list of application questions to aid you in the second and third steps:

- Is there something to worship or thank God for?
- Is there a promise for me to claim or a truth for me to believe?
- Is there something I am convicted about that I need to change or begin doing?
- Is there something or someone I need to pray for specifically this week?
- Is there any relationship I need to work on?
List principles

List at least five principles from Colossians 1:24-2:5. (Remember, a principle is simply a fact or command stated or implied in the passage that is relevant to your own life.)

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Apply one this week

Circle the one principle above you will seek to apply this week. Now create a plan to apply this principle by answering these two questions:

- What exactly will you do differently this week to apply this principle to your life? Be specific.

- Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?

Pray

End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.
The Extreme Life Makeover

COLOSSIANS 2:6-15
Pray

Begin this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of His Word, and asking for His Spirit to guide your study.

Memorize

Colossians 2:6-7 | Write it out to get your memorization started.

Why does this matter?

Makeovers, before and after photos, stories of radical change ... our culture seems to be fascinated by these, and the media serves up a steady diet of them. One of the most beloved of the television makeover shows is *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* which transforms the lives of deserving families by radically reconstructing their homes. Often the old homes are completely destroyed before the custom homes, specially equipped to meet their needs, are built.

Recently, *Extreme Makeover* selected a Texas family of six, with nine additional adopted children, five of them having special needs. In 2008, Hurricane Ike caused irreparable damage to their home, forcing the family of 15 to live in a 35-foot travel trailer. After the *Extreme Makeover* crew was finished, the family was able to move into their new 6,340 square-foot home. Also, because of generous local donations, college scholarships await the dozen children, and the family is mortgage-free, utility-bill free and newly equipped to provide for their next special-needs adoption. Needless to say, the impact on their lives has been extreme.

- If you could "extreme makeover" anything in your life (a relationship, event or trait) what would it be?

- In our world, what do you feel needs to be radically changed the most?
Observe: What do I see?

As in previous weeks, read the passage below and write down your observations, questions, and themes on the following page. This week, we will begin to **circle all of the key words or phrases**. These are words or short phrases that are important theologically (like “circumcision” in 2:11) or thematically set the theme or main idea for the passage (like “empty deception” in 2:8). Then, also begin to **highlight repeated words or phrases**, such as “in Him” throughout this passage. Also, include words and phrases that are closely related, even if not exact duplicates (such as “philosophy” and “elementary principles of the world”). You will also want to highlight things that are repeated in other passages (such as “elementary principles” found also in 2:20). Repeated concepts reveal something important to the author’s argument or provide clues to understanding his flow of thought.

**Colossians 2:6-15**

6 Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.
Themes

List out any themes or big ideas you see in this passage.

My observations

vv 6-7

vv 8-10

vv 11-12

vv 13-15
INTERPRET: What does it mean?

Here is a fifth interpretive skill - **LOOK UP BACKGROUND INFO.** You can find very helpful insights about what a passage meant to its original readers by looking up confusing names or words in a Bible dictionary (best is *The New Bible Dictionary* by Wood & Marshall, but you can find the older *Int'l Standard Bible Dictionary [ISBE]* online for free at [net.bible.org/dictionary.php](http://net.bible.org/dictionary.php)) or looking up the particular verses you are studying in a background commentary (e.g. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* by Craig Keener). Here’s an example from *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* by Dunn that should help with question #7.

“The fourth metaphor ... is drawn from the legal world ... meant literally a document written by the person responsible, a holography, so ‘receipt.’ But here it has the further sense of ‘a certificate of indebtedness, bond’ ... the record of their ‘transgressions’ ... Since the act of redemption on the cross under this imagery effects a wiping out ... the erasure of an entry in a book... the expunging of the record ... has been erased.”

1. Create and answer any two of your own interpretive questions from this passage:
   a) 
   b) 

2. How does 2:6-7 relate both to 1:24-2:5 and to 2:8-15?

3. How do verses 6-7 describe the spiritual formation process (cf. Colossians 1:28)? (Hint: Notice the verb tenses.)
4. How does Paul’s argument concerning the person and work of Christ in this passage begin to reveal the specific false “philosophy” or “tradition of men” the Colossians may have been facing? For example, Paul uses the particular construction “Christ Jesus the Lord” in 2:6 and nowhere else in his writings. What points might he be making by arranging these titles in this unique phrase (See John 4:25; Phil 2:5-7; Jude 1:4)?

5. According to this passage, what changes has Jesus accomplished for those who are “in Him” (Hint: Look for the contrasts.)? How does each of these changes provide a different picture of the significance of Christ’s work?

6. What was the “circumcision” that Paul referred to in 2:11? How were we “circumcised in Christ”? How is it similar/different from physical circumcision (See Gen 17:1-14; Rom 4:9-12; Phil 3:2-3)?

7. What did Paul mean by the “certificate of debt” in 2:14?

8. Which rulers and authorities did Christ disarm according to 2:15 (See Colossians 1:13, 16; 2:10; Eph 1:20-23; 6:12)? What was the significance of the “public display” He made of them?
What philosophies today diminish Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency in our lives? What specific principles or truths do these philosophies claim to be true?

Do you consistently feel guilt for your sin and failures even though Christ has already canceled our debt and forgiven all of our sin once and for all? If so, why?

As always, reflect on your own life, list at least five principles, and choose one to apply this week. Here is that helpful list of application questions to aid you in the second and third steps:

- Is there something to worship or thank God for?
- Is there a promise for me to claim or a truth for me to believe?
- Is there something I am convicted about that I need to change or begin doing?
- Is there something or someone I need to pray for specifically this week?
- Is there any relationship I need to work on?

Reflect on your life

What philosophies today diminish Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency in our lives? What specific principles or truths do these philosophies claim to be true?

Do you consistently feel guilt for your sin and failures even though Christ has already canceled our debt and forgiven all of our sin once and for all? If so, why?
List at least five principles from Colossians 2:6-15. (Remember, a principle is simply a fact or command stated or implied in the passage that is relevant to your own life.)

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Apply one this week

Circle the one principle above you will seek to apply this week. Now create a plan to apply this principle by answering these two questions:

- What exactly will you do differently this week to apply this principle to your life? Be specific.

- Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?

Pray

End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.
Counterfeits Among Us
COLOSSIANS 2:16-23
During the Civil War, it was estimated that one-third of all US currency in circulation was counterfeit. At that time, there were approximately 1,600 state banks designing and printing their own notes. Each note carried a different design, making it difficult to distinguish the 4,000 varieties of counterfeits from the 7,000 varieties of genuine notes. Despite the adoption of a national currency in 1863, it was soon counterfeited so extensively it became necessary for the government to take enforcement measures. On July 5, 1865, the United States Secret Service was established to identify and suppress counterfeiting. Instead of focusing their strategy on identifying the unique characteristics of each variety of counterfeit currency, the Secret Service training emphasized the distinctive traits of genuine currency. They knew one of the most effective methods to identify a counterfeit was to know the look and feel of an authentic bill.

**Why does this matter?**

During the Civil War, it was estimated that one-third of all US currency in circulation was counterfeit. At that time, there were approximately 1,600 state banks designing and printing their own notes. Each note carried a different design, making it difficult to distinguish the 4,000 varieties of counterfeits from the 7,000 varieties of genuine notes. Despite the adoption of a national currency in 1863, it was soon counterfeited so extensively it became necessary for the government to take enforcement measures. On July 5, 1865, the United States Secret Service was established to identify and suppress counterfeiting. Instead of focusing their strategy on identifying the unique characteristics of each variety of counterfeit currency, the Secret Service training emphasized the distinctive traits of genuine currency. They knew one of the most effective methods to identify a counterfeit was to know the look and feel of an authentic bill.

**Pray**

Begin this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of His Word, and asking for His Spirit to guide your study.

**Memorize**

Colossians 2:23 | Write it out to get your memorization started.

---

**Why does this matter?**

During the Civil War, it was estimated that one-third of all US currency in circulation was counterfeit. At that time, there were approximately 1,600 state banks designing and printing their own notes. Each note carried a different design, making it difficult to distinguish the 4,000 varieties of counterfeits from the 7,000 varieties of genuine notes. Despite the adoption of a national currency in 1863, it was soon counterfeited so extensively it became necessary for the government to take enforcement measures. On July 5, 1865, the United States Secret Service was established to identify and suppress counterfeiting. Instead of focusing their strategy on identifying the unique characteristics of each variety of counterfeit currency, the Secret Service training emphasized the distinctive traits of genuine currency. They knew one of the most effective methods to identify a counterfeit was to know the look and feel of an authentic bill.

**What kinds of counterfeit spirituality do we see in our culture today?**

**How can understanding where others have departed from truth aid our growth?**
As in previous weeks, read the passage below and write down your observations, questions, and themes on the following page. Also, circle all key words and highlight all repeated words or phrases. This week, we will begin to **BOX CONNECTING WORDS**. We will learn four types of connecting words this week:

**COMPARISON**: either points out similarities between two or more related ideas, or simply joins like ideas. Comparison words include: **and, like, as, just as, also, so also, even so** (e.g. “joints AND ligaments” 2:19).

**CONTRAST**: points out dissimilarities between ideas. Contrast words include: **but, rather, yet, however** (e.g. “things which are a mere shadow ... BUT the substance belongs ....” 2:17).

**PURPOSE**: indicates the intended goal of an idea or action, whether or not it was realized. Purpose words include: **that, so that, in order that** (e.g. “filled with the knowledge of His will ... SO THAT you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” 1:9-10).

**RESULT**: very similar to “purpose,” but indicates the actual consequence, whether or not it was intended. Result words include: **that, so that, as a result, with the result that** (e.g. “I have sent him to you ... THAT you may know about our circumstances” 4:8).

---

**Colossians 2:16-23**

16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day - 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use ) - in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.
Themes

List out any themes or big ideas you see in this passage.

My observations

vv 16-17

vv 18-19

vv 20-22

v 23
How do we answer difficult interpretive questions when more than one option seems possible? This requires two skills, the first of which is... **LIST ALL THE OPTIONS WITH PROS AND CONS.** Always start by brainstorming, listing every possible answer to your question. Be open-minded and creative, and do not rush this process. You will often find that your third option proves better than your first. Once you have created a list of possible options, list both pros and cons for each one. You are looking for all the evidence you can find that either argues for or against a particular option. This evidence comes from your study of key words, the grammar of the sentence, the context of surrounding verses and the book as a whole, cross references to other books, and comparison with your overall understanding of Christian theology. Once you have thought about it for a while individually, feel free to talk with others and to check commentaries or references to see if you have missed any options (However, do not just assume that their favorite option is necessarily correct!).

The second skill needed to answer difficult interpretive questions is... **CHOOSE THE MOST LIKELY OPTION AND DECIDE ON CERTAINTY.** Look back at all of your evidence for each option. Typically, evidence from the immediate context is most important, followed closely by evidence from the book as a whole. Evidence from other books, or from Christian theology as a whole, does not carry quite as much weight, unless the solution you are looking at contradicts a clear passage elsewhere or a major tenant of Christian doctrine. In that case, since Scripture never lies and God cannot contradict Himself, you know that option is invalid. Once you have chosen the best solution, step back for a second and humbly gauge how certain you are of its accuracy (90% = I am very sure this is correct ... 60% = This solution is just a bit more likely than the others!). Finally, talk with others and check commentaries or reference books to see what solutions they have chosen and why.

1. Create and answer any three of your own interpretive questions from this passage:
   
   a) 
   b) 
   c) 

3. How does this passage identify the false teaching these Colossian believers were facing? How does the content of the false teaching also reveal the identity of these false teachers?

4. How had Christ’s death on the cross changed the New Testament believer’s relationship to the Old Testament law? (See Rom 7:6; 10:4.) Why was there a need for a change? (See Deut 5:29; Gal 3:21; Heb 10:1-4.) How should the believer today relate to foods and festivals? (See Mark 7:18-19; Acts 10:9-16; 1 Cor 8:8-9; Gal 4:9-11.)

5. Why were the mystical activities of verse 18 so troubling to Paul? How did “self-abasement” and “the worship of angels” and even “visions” describe the activities of these false teachers?

6. What is the difference between asceticism, or self-denial for the sake of self-denial, and biblical self-denial? (See Gal 3:1-3; Phil 3:1-8; Rom 6:8-13; Gal 5:13-18.) Why are the decrees of verse 21 of no value against indulgence of the flesh?

7. From the entirety of this section, what was the “prize” that these Colossian believers could lose if they were defrauded by such false philosophies?

My summary

In one sentence, use your own words to describe the main point that Paul communicates in this passage.

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________
As always, reflect on your own life, list at least five principles, and choose one to apply this week. Here is that helpful list of application questions to aid you in the second and third steps:

- Is there something to worship or thank God for?
- Is there a promise for me to claim or a truth for me to believe?
- Is there something I am convicted about that I need to change or begin doing?
- Is there something or someone I need to pray for specifically this week?
- Is there any relationship I need to work on?

Do the dangers that threatened the Colossians exist today for us? If so, how do we protect ourselves from them?

How can we diligently be involved with spiritual disciplines like fasting, prayer, and Bible meditation without falling into the same dangers that threatened the Colossians?
List principles

List at least five principles from Colossians 2:16-23. (Remember, a principle is simply a fact or command stated or implied in the passage that is relevant to your own life.)

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Apply one this week

Circle the one principle above you will seek to apply this week. Now create a plan to apply this principle by answering these two questions:

➤ What exactly will you do differently this week to apply this principle to your life? Be specific.

➤ Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?

Pray

End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.
The Heavenly Mindset
COLOSSIANS 3:1-11
Jim walked into the family room just in time to see his three teenage daughters roll their eyes and attempt to hide their laughter. “What has dear old dad done now?” he thought. Jim was a great dad who loved to spend time with his daughters. He enjoyed chatting with his girls about music and the latest episode of *Lost*. He kept up with the latest technology and regularly updated his Facebook page. Jim owned the new iPhone and even had a Twitter account. But as Jim looked at their giggling faces, he knew what they were thinking.

In spite of all his modern advances, Jim had one area of his life where he was absolutely “prehistoric” – his wardrobe. “Dad, your shirt is so 1986!” “Please let us take you to the mall for an intervention!” “We are going to submit your name to that reality show *What Not to Wear*!” These were among the comments Jim heard regularly. As much as he tried, Jim couldn’t seem to get rid of his old fashioned way of dressing.

**Why does this matter?**

Jim walked into the family room just in time to see his three teenage daughters roll their eyes and attempt to hide their laughter. “What has dear old dad done now?” he thought. Jim was a great dad who loved to spend time with his daughters. He enjoyed chatting with his girls about music and the latest episode of *Lost*. He kept up with the latest technology and regularly updated his Facebook page. Jim owned the new iPhone and even had a Twitter account. But as Jim looked at their giggling faces, he knew what they were thinking.

In spite of all his modern advances, Jim had one area of his life where he was absolutely “prehistoric” – his wardrobe. “Dad, your shirt is so 1986!” “Please let us take you to the mall for an intervention!” “We are going to submit your name to that reality show *What Not to Wear*!” These were among the comments Jim heard regularly. As much as he tried, Jim couldn’t seem to get rid of his old fashioned way of dressing.

- Are there areas of your life that seem like outdated traces of your life before trusting Christ?

- Can others see areas of your life that have changed since trusting Christ?
Colossians 3:1-11

1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him - 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.
List out any themes or big ideas you see in this passage.

Themes

My observations

vv 1-2

vv 3-5

vv 6-8

vv 9-11
For the next few weeks, we will learn three fundamental PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION that help us to use our interpretive skills accurately. **Principle #1 - Your goal is to discern the author’s intended meaning to the original audience.** Unfortunately, most people begin their Bible study by asking, “What does this passage mean to me?” While there may be multiple possible applications to my life, there is only one meaning, the author’s intended meaning; and we must first seek this out. This involves three important steps:

1. **Always start your study with prayer,** asking the same God who composed Scripture through these ancient authors to give you insight to understand His intended meaning.
2. Be very careful to **avoid reading your 21st century circumstances and theological issues** into the text as they will skew your understanding.
3. Work diligently to see the text **from the point of view of the original readers.** To do this: (a) dig into the historical and cultural background using Bible dictionaries and commentaries, and (b) spend a few moments thinking about the original audience’s religious understanding by asking - What books of the Bible did they have access to? What did they know about God? about Jesus? about salvation? etc.

1. Create and answer any three of your own interpretive questions from this passage:
   a)
   b)
   c)

2. How does 3:1-4 relate to 2:16-23? How does 3:1-4 also relate to 3:5-11 (Hint: Notice the “therefore.”)?

3. How does Paul describe the mindset we are to have in verses 1-4? How do we practically maintain this mindset daily? (See Romans 8:5-8, 27; 12:2-3, 16; Phil 2:5; 3:15-16, 18-19.)
4. For each of the following sins, (1) provide a brief description of the sin, and (2) describe how it can at times become idolatrous …
   Immorality & impurity (1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:15-18; 1 Thess 4:3-5)
   Passion & evil desire (1 Thess 4:5)
   Greed (Luke 12:15)

5. Why is Paul so concerned with sins of speech in verse 8?

6. Define the following terms from this passage and determine whether they refer to an individual person or to a group of people.
   “old man/self” (See Romans 6:6-7; Ephesians 4:20-24; and Galatians 2:20.)
   “new man/self” (See Ephesians 2:15; 4:20-24; and 2 Corinthians 5:17.)

7. According to verses 10-11, how does Paul describe the transformation process of the “new man/self”?

My summary

In one sentence, use your own words to describe the main point that Paul communicates in this passage.
As always, reflect on your own life, list at least five principles, and choose one to apply this week. Here is that helpful list of application questions to aid you in the second and third steps:

- Is there something to worship or thank God for?
- Is there a promise for me to claim or a truth for me to believe?
- Is there something I am convicted about that I need to change or begin doing?
- Is there something or someone I need to pray for specifically this week?
- Is there any relationship I need to work on?

Reflect on your life

- What attitudes or actions in your life need to be put to death so that you can better maintain a mindset on eternity?

- Are you pursuing spiritual change all by yourself or have you found some fellow brothers and sisters with whom you can be transparent and accountable?
List at least five principles from Colossians 3:1-11. (Remember, a principle is simply a fact or command stated or implied in the passage that is relevant to your own life.)

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Apply one this week

Circle the one principle above you will seek to apply this week. Now create a plan to apply this principle by answering these two questions:

- What exactly will you do differently this week to apply this principle to your life? *Be specific.*

- Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?

Pray

End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.
Living in Community

COLOSSIANS 3:12-4:1
In May of 1987, “With or Without You” became U2’s first number-one hit in the United States by topping the charts for three weeks in a row. The familiar lyrics of the song as detailed below explain the tension Bono experienced between his responsibilities as a musician traveling on tour and his commitments as a family man. Yet, the same tension also resonated for millions who recognized their desperate need for community and their incredible difficulty with it …

Why does this matter?

As you reflect on the lyrics to the song, why do you think it is so difficult to live with others?

Why would it be difficult to live without others?
Colossians 3:12-4:1

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. 22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 24 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. 25 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.
Themes

List out any themes or big ideas you see in this passage.

My observations

vv 12-14

vv 15-17

vv 18-22

vv 23-4:1
This week, we will begin to **MAP THE PASSAGE**. This skill is a fantastic way to discover the author’s intended meaning and flow of thought. It will also help you answer many of your interpretive questions. The first rule of mapping a passage is: **There is not one “right” way!** However you create your map, your goal should be to discover the author’s flow of thought by graphically laying out the passage. Before you complete the passage map for Colossians 3:12-17 on the next page, here are some rules to follow with examples from Ephesians 1:3-5 ...

1) First, identify the main subject and verb of the first sentence (These form the main clause of your sentence). Write the main clause at the top left of your paper. Think of your map as an outline: This would be your Roman numeral I.

   **1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**
   This is the main clause of Eph. 1:3

2) Continue writing the first sentence, placing any modifying phrases or words directly under the words they modify. A modifying phrase describes something in the main clause – how, why, when, to whom, etc. In an outline, this would be your first subheading.

   **1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**

   who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing
   "who" modifies, or is talking about, God in this sentence

3) If there are multiple modifiers (several phrases or words all talking about the same thing), line them up underneath each other, under the word or phrase they are modifying.

   **1:3 ...who has blessed us...**
   4 just as He chose us...
   5 ...He predestined us...
   Both of the phrases in vv4-5 will have modifiers in your final map, but the phrases themselves should be lined up since they both modify God’s act of blessing. This is like the a., b., c. in your outline.

4) Continue writing out the phrases in your sentence, each under whatever word(s) they modify, until you reach the end of the sentence or idea being discussed.

5) Your map will continue moving to the right of your paper until the author begins a new idea. At that point, you would put the next main clause back to the far left of your paper and begin at step one again. Ideally, you should be able to glance down the left side of your paper and see the main ideas of the passage you are mapping.

6) As you work, box all connecting words, and note how they are being used.

   **1:4 just as He chose us ... (AS implies comparison)**
Colossians 3:12-17

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.
This week we will learn our second of three PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION. **Principle #2 - Assume a “normal” use of language.** The Bible was given to us because God desired to communicate with us, not to hide Himself from us. Therefore, we should not be looking for hidden meanings as we study. Instead, we should use the normal techniques we would use to understand any piece of literature:

1. **Study the grammar.** Yes, most of us hated grammar in junior high, but it really is helpful for understanding Scripture! Pay attention to nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions. Think through any figures of speech. Observe how phrases and clauses are connected into sentences and how sentences are linked together into paragraphs.

2. **Remember that chapters came later.** When Paul wrote Ephesians or Luke wrote the book of Acts, they wrote single, unified stories without verse or chapter divisions. These books were meant to be read just like you would read a letter or a novel. Always keep the overall story in mind as you study each passage.

1. Create and answer any three of your own interpretive questions from this passage:
   a)

   b)

   c)

2. How does Paul describe the characteristics and activities of this new community in verses 12-14?

3. Why does Paul place emphasis on the need for forgiveness in verse 13? What does it mean to forgive (cf. Eph 4:32)?
4. Compare Colossians 3:15-17 to Ephesians 5:18-20. What do these 2 passages teach us about the relationship between the “word of Christ” and the “Spirit”? Can you be powerfully filled with the Spirit apart from being grounded in the Word of Christ?

5. What does it mean do everything “in the name of the Lord Jesus”? (See Matt 21:9; 28:19; Acts 9:28; James 5:14.)

6. Paul outlines various relationships in 3:18-4:1. List the responsibilities and motivations for each in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. How do you reconcile Paul’s distinction between different groups of people in 3:18-4:1 with his earlier statement in 3:11 that there is “no distinction” between different peoples in Christ?

My summary

In one sentence, use your own words to describe the main point that Paul communicates in this passage.
As always, **reflect on your own life, list at least five principles, and choose one to apply this week.** Here is that helpful list of application questions to aid you in the second and third steps:

- Is there something to worship or thank God for?
- Is there a promise for me to claim or a truth for me to believe?
- Is there something I am convicted about that I need to change or begin doing?
- Is there something or someone I need to pray for specifically this week?
- Is there any relationship I need to work on?

**Reflect on your life**

- Look at the family role/positions mentioned in 3:18-4:1. Which of these most apply to you personally at this time in your life? How are you doing in this role lately? How can you do better this week?

- Which one of the commands in this passage challenged you most this week? How do you plan to obey it more fully?
List principles

List at least five principles from Colossians 3:12-4:1. (Remember, a principle is simply a fact or command stated or implied in the passage that is relevant to your own life.)

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Apply one this week

Circle the one principle above you will seek to apply this week. Now create a plan to apply this principle by answering these two questions:

➢ What exactly will you do differently this week to apply this principle to your life?
   *Be specific.*

➢ Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?

Pray

End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.
The Essentials of Ministry

COLOSSIANS 4:2-18
For years, Blake had wanted to climb to the top of the Continental Divide just outside Lake City. The day of the climb had finally arrived; and so Blake checked his gear: backpack, water, energy bars, light lunch, hat, sun screen, extra socks...all were present and accounted for. The trail up toward the Divide was well-worn and easy to follow. Fatigue and difficulty in breathing were easy to struggle through as Blake emerged above the tree line to discover one exhilarating view after another culminating at the peak. After a great meal at the top with his family followed by some much-needed rest, it was time to begin the descent.

As he descended, Blake soon realized two miscalculations he had made. First, descending a steep mountain is no easy task as he was feeling the strain on groups of muscles he did not even know he had. Second, the exertion on his body during the descent caused him to drink water every two or three minutes. About a quarter of the way down the mountain Blake’s canteen was empty, but he kept going. About halfway down he began to feel the effects of dehydration. Nausea set in quickly and powerfully. His legs began to cramp, making each downward stride excruciatingly painful. He became confused and disoriented. He had failed to realize his essential need for water until it ran out. Other members of his family gave him their water, but it was too late. Blake was done. He laid down on the well-worn track and could not imagine taking another step.

One of his daughters ran for help; and finally the mountain rescue team came. They revived him with fluids and after an hour or so, slowly escorted him down the mountain. The air became easier to breath, and the fluids revitalized his body. Blake’s mind cleared and the cramps subsided. Finally, he walked into camp fully revived and ready for dinner. Blake never forgot that day...not because he climbed to the top of the Continental Divide but because he learned the absolute need and value of precious, precious, water!

What things are essential to life and ministry? What happens when we overlook these things?
We have no new observation skills this week. As in previous weeks, read the passage, underline the verbs, circle the key words, box any connecting words, and highlight repeated words or phrases. Then, write your observations and questions on the following page. Now that you have practiced all the basic skills, feel free to add your own techniques. Some people prefer to work on a computer, making mapping a passage much easier. Others like to use colored highlighters or pencils to mark verbs, key words, and connecting words. Many find it helpful to add arrows connecting related ideas or symbols to highlight important names.

Colossians 4:2-18

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4 that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. 5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. 7 As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. 8 For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; 9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here. 10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); 11 and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas. 15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. 16 When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. 17 Say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.” 18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.
List out any themes or big ideas you see in this passage.

Themes

My observations

vv 2-5

vv 6-9

vv 10-13

vv 14-18
INTERPRET: What does it mean?

This week we will learn our last of three PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION. Principle #3 - Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Since God is unchangingly truthful and always consistent (John 17:17; Hebrews 3:6; James 1:17), we can, and should, expect the same of His Word. This has two practical applications:

1. **Check your conclusions.** Always compare your conclusions with the teachings of Scripture as a whole. If you find that your interpretation of a passage contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture elsewhere, you probably need to revise your conclusions.

2. **Allow clear passages to illuminate ambiguous passages.** Whenever you encounter a passage that is confusing or open to multiple possible interpretations, use clearer passages of Scripture to guide you to the correct interpretation.

**One last caution** - remember that God revealed Scripture progressively, not all at once. Therefore, we should not be surprised by differences between how people related to and understood God at different times in the history of Scripture. For example, while Abraham needed only believe that God was faithful in order to be justified (Genesis 15:6), in the NT era, we must believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus to be saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-7).

1. Create and answer any three of your own interpretive questions from this passage:
   a)
   b)
   c)

2. Why does Paul begin his discussion in verses 2-6 with the subject of prayer? How does he characterize the nature and purpose of prayer?
3. What exactly is “wise conduct” toward outsiders? (See Matt 5:16; Rom 13:7-8; Eph 5:15; 1 Thess 4:11-12; 1 Peter 2:12.)

4. Why does Paul use the imagery of “seasoned with salt” to describe the kind of speech necessary to respond to each person (Matt 5:13)? What characteristics does salt possess that make it an appropriate image for wise speech?

5. What does this passage reveal about the individual and ministerial needs Paul had as a servant of the Lord? What characteristics were true of him and his ministry that made him effective?

My summary

In one sentence, use your own words to describe the main point that Paul communicates in this passage.
Why is it such a struggle to remain devoted and alert in prayer? What practical steps can we take to grow in prayer?

In 4:17, Archippus was instructed to “take heed to the ministry … that (he) may fulfill it.” What ministry do you sense the Lord asking you to fulfill?

As always, reflect on your own life, list at least five principles, and choose one to apply this week. Here is that helpful list of application questions to aid you in the second and third steps:

- Is there something to worship or thank God for?
- Is there a promise for me to claim or a truth for me to believe?
- Is there something I am convicted about that I need to change or begin doing?
- Is there something or someone I need to pray for specifically this week?
- Is there any relationship I need to work on?
List principles

List at least five principles from Colossians 4:2-18. (Remember, a principle is simply a fact or command stated or implied in the passage that is relevant to your own life.)

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Apply one this week

Circle the one principle above you will seek to apply this week. Now create a plan to apply this principle by answering these two questions:

- What exactly will you do differently this week to apply this principle to your life?  
  Be specific.

- Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?

Pray

End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.
Put it Back Together

COLOSSIANS SYNTHESIS
Summarize what Colossians teaches us about the supremacy of Jesus Christ. List out all of the reasons and resulting implications of Christ’s supremacy found in Colossians below.

Summarize what Colossians teaches about the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. List out all of the reasons and resulting implications of Christ’s sufficiency found in Colossians below.

In the case study of lesson four (page 33), we met Gary whose lazy Sunday afternoon on the couch watching football was interrupted by a pair of Jehovah’s Witnesses. They explained to Gary that Jesus, God’s “firstborn,” was the first created being. They presented to Gary a different view of the person and work of Jesus Christ that essentially diminished His supremacy and sufficiency. Having studied the book of Colossians in detail, answer the following questions keeping Gary in mind ...

Why does this matter?

Begin this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of His Word, and asking for His Spirit to guide your study.

Pray

Memorize

Review your memory verses for each of the previous lessons.

- 1:5-6  
- 1:9-10  
- 1:15-16

- 1:28  
- 2:6-7  
- 2:23

- 3:1-2  
- 3:12-13  
- 4:2-3

Memorize

- 1:5-6
- 1:9-10
- 1:15-16
- 1:28
- 2:6-7
- 2:23
- 3:1-2
- 3:12-13
- 4:2-3
During the past ten lessons, we have observed, interpreted, and applied the entire book of Colossians. That is no small task! Now it is time to draw our detailed study to a useful conclusion, a process known as synthesis. Our goal is to create an overall summary of the book of Colossians that we can quickly review any time in the future to remind us of the flow and content of the book.

But first, please realize how much we have developed as students of the Word during this study! Though you have focused on Colossians, you have actually learned and practiced a method of Bible study that will help you understand and apply to your life any passage of Scripture! Observe, interpret, and apply. These are the three fundamental steps of all Bible study, and they will serve you well for a lifetime. As we draw Colossians to a close, please continue to practice and refine these skills so that you will be, “a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Outline the book

The first step of this synthesis is to CREATE YOUR OWN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK. Review the work you completed each week, especially the summary sentences you have written for each passage in the “My Summary” section. Then, create your own brief outline on the next page. Feel free to use any outlining style, but here is an example of how you might start.

1. Introduction (1:1-14)
   a. Greeting (1:1-2)
   b. Thanksgiving (1:3-8)
   c. Prayer (1:9-14)

2. Explanation of Christ (1:15-29)
My Colossians Outline
The second step of this synthesis is to **RECORD WHAT YOU LEARNED OR WERE REMINDED OF.** This is more personal than your outline. Create a list of the theological truths and life lessons you have either learned for the first time or been reminded of from your study of Colossians.

As an example of a theological truth, you might write:

> I was taught that all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Jesus.

An example of a life lesson would be:

> This book reminded me that the church’s goal is to present every man complete in Christ through a process that comes with great cost & struggle.

List at least ten theological truths and ten life lessons on this page that you learned from your study of Colossians, and record the verses where each is addressed.
SYNTHESIS: How does it all fit together?

The final step of this synthesis is to **PRAYERFULLY CHOOSE TWO APPLICATIONS TO PRACTICE**. These can be applications that you developed and began to practice during previous lessons, or you can create entirely new applications. Whatever your choice, two things must be true about them:

1. Both applications should touch on **areas of your life where you are currently in need of growth**. Do not choose “be kind to others” if this is already something you do very well.

2. Both should **be specific** with a clear plan for growth and the name of someone who will hold you accountable. “Study the Word more” is not sufficiently detailed. Instead, develop a specific plan such as “I will read through Romans this next month and write down my observations, interpretive questions, and applications in a journal. Steve will hold me accountable weekly.”

**Application #1**

**Principle from Colossians:**

**Verses where it is discussed:**

**Plan of Action:** I will...

**Application #2**

**Principle from Colossians:**

**Verses where it is discussed:**

**Plan of Action:** I will...

End your study by returning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned this week, ask Him to help you apply the principle you have chosen, and lay before Him the needs of your fellow small group members.
Appendix

1. Principles of Interpretation - p97
2. Creating Lists - p98
3. Discipleship Resources - p99
1) Principles of Interpretation

Principle #1 - Your goal is to discern the author’s intended meaning to the original audience. Unfortunately, most people begin their Bible study by asking, “What does this passage mean to me?” While there may be multiple possible applications to my life, there is only one meaning, the author’s intended meaning; and we must first seek this out. This involves three important steps.

1. Always start your study with prayer, asking the same God who composed Scripture through these ancient authors to give you insight to understand His intended meaning.

2. Be very careful to avoid reading your 21st century circumstances and theological issues into the text as they will skew your understanding.

3. Work diligently to see the text from the point of view of the original readers. To do this: [a] dig into the historical and cultural background using Bible dictionaries and commentaries, and [b] spend a few moments thinking about the original audience’s religious understanding by asking - What books of the Bible did they have access to? What did they know about God? about Jesus? about salvation? etc.

Principle #2 - Assume a “normal” use of language. The Bible was given to us because God desired to communicate with us, not to hide Himself from us. Therefore, we should not be looking for “hidden” meanings as we study. Instead, we should use the “normal” techniques we would use to understand any piece of literature:

1. Study the grammar. Yes, most of us hated grammar in junior high, but it really is helpful for understanding Scripture! Pay attention to nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions. Think through any figures of speech. Observe how phrases and clauses are connected into sentences and how sentences are linked together into paragraphs.

2. Remember that chapters came later. When Paul wrote Corinthians or Luke wrote the book of Acts, they wrote single, unified stories without verse or chapter divisions. These books were meant to be read just like you would read a letter or a novel. Always keep the overall story in mind as you study each passage.

Principle #3 - Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Since God is unchangingly truthful and always consistent (John 17:17; Hebrews 3:6; James 1:17), we can, and should, expect the same of His Word. This has two practical applications:

1. Check your conclusions. Always compare your conclusions with the teachings of Scripture as a whole. If you find that your interpretation of a passage contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture elsewhere, you probably need to revise your conclusions.

2. Allow clear passages to illuminate ambiguous passages. Whenever you encounter a passage that is confusing or open to multiple possible interpretations, use clearer passages of Scripture to guide you to the correct interpretation.

One last caution - remember that God revealed Scripture progressively, not all at once. Therefore, we should not be surprised by differences between how people related to and understood God at different times in the history of Scripture. For example, while Abraham needed only believe that God was faithful in order to be justified (Genesis 15:6), in the NT era, we must believe in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection to be saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-7).
2) Bonus Skill: Creating Lists

This skill involves identifying a key word, subject, person, place, or event in the passage and then listing every fact given about that word. For example, if you made a list on “God” from 2 Timothy 1, it might look like this:

God...

1. made Paul an apostle by His will (v1).
2. gives grace, mercy and peace (v2).
3. is the Father (v2).
4. is thanked and served (v3).
5. gives gifts (v6).
6. doesn’t give spirit of timidity (v7).
7. gives spirit of power, love, and sound mind (v7).
8. gives power for suffering (v9).
9. saved us (v9).
10. called us (v9).

As you read this list, what jumps out at you? Perhaps you see that “God gives” is mentioned five times in this list. What a gracious and loving God we serve! You have discovered one of the characteristics of God: His generous grace toward men. By creating these lists, you will begin to see patterns of truth that you will want to study further. For example, this list about God may lead you to do a word study on give or find all the other references in Paul’s epistles to God’s giving nature. Furthermore, this list can now be used for meditation, to praise and worship God, to encourage others, and to proclaim the character of God to the lost.

One word of caution about lists, however. Just because you are able to create a list centered on a key word, such as “God” in 2 Timothy 1, does not mean that Paul’s main point in the passage is to talk about that key word. Paul’s emphasis in 2 Timothy 1, in fact, is not to discuss attributes about God; it is to encourage Timothy to press on in the ministry of the gospel. Make sure that before you create any lists, you complete the initial processes of observation: list themes, mark up the text, and record your most significant observations. However, after these initial tasks, creating lists is a great way to deepen your study of a passage!
3) Discipleship Resources

One of the predominant themes throughout the book of Colossians is Paul’s desire to present every man complete in Christ. It is important that we know the truth of the Bible and that our lives would more and more begin to reflect Jesus Christ. Spiritual growth clearly involves study of God’s word, but it also involves transformation of our character and life. This process is often called “discipleship” and refers to an intentional relationship between a mature believer and a younger believer where the former trains the latter towards the goal of spiritual maturity. Paul’s discipleship of Timothy (and Titus as well) is one the greatest examples we have of this process in all of Scripture. And like Paul, we too can make a lasting impact for God’s kingdom by spiritually reproducing ourselves in the lives of others.

Going through this Bible study was one of the best steps you could take to prepare you to disciple someone else because now you know how to explain and defend key biblical truths like the gospel, spiritual leadership, grace, and salvation. Just as important, you have now learned and practiced the basic method of Bible study - survey, observe, interpret, apply, synthesize. These are key steps towards spiritual maturity that you can now pass on to others!

But where can you go from here to learn more about spiritual multiplication? Here are a few helpful resources:

- **The Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert Coleman**
  This is a highly motivational analysis of Jesus' own principles of evangelism and discipleship.

- **The Lost Art of Disciple Making by Leroy Eims**
  This very practical resource will give you a detailed structure to follow and great content to cover as you begin to disciple a new believer.

- **A Survey of Bible Doctrine by Charles Ryrie**
  This is not a book about discipleship. It is, instead, an easy-to-read, relatively short systematic theology primer that you can walk a new believer through to ground them in the faith.

- **Essentials of the Faith by Grace Bible Church, CS TX**
  This small group Bible study packet walks a new believer through the fundamental truths and practices of the Christian faith in ten self-paced lessons.