



**A Bible Reading Plan for Galatians, Ephesians,
Philippians, & Colossians**

June 12 - August 21, 2016

Mountain Brook Baptist Church
www.mbbc.org



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

ABOUT PROJECT 119

Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church body would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan will guide you through the books of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. The plan provides you a devotional thought and suggested Scripture reading for each day of the week. On the weekends, we suggest that you re-read the Scripture passages that you have been working through during the past week.

To receive email updates when devotionals are added to the blog, go to www.mbbc.org/blog, click on "Subscribe to Mountain Brook Blog by Email" and follow the instructions. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit www.mbbc.org/project119.

INTRODUCTION

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians are all letters written by the apostle Paul. Paul was once a persecutor of the church and a zealous Jew, but his life was forever changed when he met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. While the story of Paul's conversion is told in Acts, we will see snippets of his autobiography as Paul highlights the significance of salvation by grace through faith in these letters.

As we begin each new letter, our devotional will begin with a short introduction to help give us some information about Paul's audience and his reason for writing. Although these letters are sent to different congregations for different purposes, over and over again Paul will remind us of the good news of the gospel - that we find hope and forgiveness in Jesus' work on the cross. Our salvation is complete in Him. Our prayer is that, as you read these letters, you will be reminded of what God has done for you in Jesus and that you will rejoice in the hope of your salvation!



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK ONE: GALATIANS 1:1-2:21 JUNE 13-19

Monday, June 13 | Galatians 1:1-10 | Doug Dortch

"No Other Gospel"

Paul's letter to the Galatians is one of Paul's earliest letters, written from Corinth around AD 56 to believers scattered in the province of Galatia, a region in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), where cities such as Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe were located. Paul had visited this area on his first missionary journey, as described in Acts 13-14. The purpose of the letter was to confront those from the outside who had come into the region and were questioning Paul's authority as an apostle, causing confusion for the believers there by insisting that they had to submit to certain rites of the Jewish law. Paul counters their questions and false teaching by defending his apostolic authority and establishing the foundation for what would become his greatest theological contribution to Christian doctrine: justification by faith alone.

The tone of these opening verses shows how Galatians was the most severe of all Paul's letters. He doesn't begin with any words of praise for his readers, as is most often the case with others of Paul's letters. Instead, he takes his readers to task for how they have so gullibly accepted the false teachings of these "Judaizers," who would turn the Galatians away from liberating grace to the bondage of having to earn their salvation. Paul calls this false teaching "another gospel." But the truth of the matter is that it is no gospel at all, because it lacks the heart of the good news of Jesus, who through our faith in Him does for us what none of us could ever do for ourselves.

These opening verses set the stage for helping us to see that Jesus "plus" anything else is a false gospel. His grace is sufficient enough for your every need. Trust your heart to Him each day and know that His power is enough to see you through whatever may be before you and His mercy is enough to deliver you from whatever has held you back. It is "astonishing" (Galatians 1:6) that anyone would run the risk of forfeiting such a gift. Don't be guilty of such a mistake, even when others tell you that grace alone can't satisfy your soul. It most definitely can.

Tuesday, June 14 | Galatians 1:11-24 | Doug Dortch

"Called by God"

Credentials are important. People who misrepresent themselves deserve to be met with suspicion. That's why in today's passage Paul is so careful to emphasize how his credibility was grounded in God's (continued on next page)



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WEEK ONE: GALATIANS 1:1-2:21 JUNE 13-19

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call and not in any set of human standards.

It wasn't that Paul couldn't have pointed to such standards; indeed he goes into great detail to point to his "resume" as an up and coming Jewish religious authority. But when Jesus was revealed to him on the Damascus Road, everything changed for Paul and he was seized by the power of a greater affection. The fast track that Paul had been on now paled in comparison to the new way opened up for him in Christ Jesus.

What I find most inspiring about Paul's testimony is how he shares about his willingness to return to the places of his past so that he might testify to the changes that his faith in Jesus were making in his life. Without question, a changed life is undeniable proof of the gospel's power. So what changes is your faith in Christ bringing about in your life, and who are the people with whom you need to be sharing those changes?

Wednesday, June 15 | Galatians 2:1-10 | Doug Dortch

"Accepted by the Apostles"

Things began to go south for Paul in his relationship with fellow ministers when he refused to compel Titus, one of his ministry associates, to submit to the Old Testament rite of circumcision, which for the Jews had been a badge of ethnic pride and a requirement for Gentiles to join their ranks. Paul's refusal to demand Titus' acceptance of circumcision was based on his belief that faith in Jesus alone was sufficient for salvation. Jesus "plus" anything else diminished for Paul the power of salvation by grace through faith.

Evidently, things got testy for Paul as "those who seemed to be important" worked to pressure him to have Titus, a Gentile convert, submit to certain Old Testament regulations. But when Paul stated his case to the "pillars" of the early church, they acknowledged Paul's special call to the Gentiles and only asked that he not forsake his duty to the poor (Galatians 2:10). In response, Paul acknowledged that he would continue that important part of his ministry.

Paul was independent in his spirit, but he was certainly no schismatic. Paul wasn't interested in upsetting the apple cart just to be contentious. As he made his case to those who had been in positions of leadership for a longer period of time, a consensus emerged, and Paul's calling was given
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WEEK ONE: GALATIANS 1:1-2:21 JUNE 13-19

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legitimacy by those in positions of authority.

Sometimes well-intentioned people stand in the way of the advance of the gospel by insisting that things be done “their way or the highway.” It’s never easy to stand your ground in the face of powerful opposition. But when a decision must be made as to how you must proceed into God’s future, the best way to go is the way that promotes Christ. Only then will you be certain to be on solid ground.

Thursday, June 16 | Galatians 2:11-14 | Doug Dortch

“Opposition and Confrontation”

Paul came to discover that some people “cave” under peer pressure, even stalwart believers like Simon Peter. As Paul describes Peter’s “drawing back” from Gentile fellowship in Antioch once leaders from Jerusalem came to visit, he uses a military term for a cautious retreat. And not only did Peter step back, so did others, including Paul’s faithful colleague Barnabas, the very “son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36)!

Paul, of course, didn’t hesitate to point out their inconsistency, though to his credit he didn’t do so in a smug or condescending way. Paul was grieved over their contradictory witness to the Gentiles and only called attention to it so that it would not bring further harm to the missionary work in the locale, far removed from Jerusalem.

Sometimes sincere believers lose their way; if it can happen to stalwart believers like Peter and Barnabas, it can happen to any of us. When it does happen, there needs to be compassion and understanding but also direct confrontation. Speaking the truth “in love” is never easy but it is the only way to ensure that the character of our testimonies remain strong. However, before you call out anyone for their inconsistency, ask yourself if you need to be called out as well. Such honest examination will keep our hearts pure even as we seek to hold one another accountable to that good news of how grace offers all a second chance.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK ONE: GALATIANS 1:1-2:21 JUNE 13-19

Friday, June 17 | Galatians 2:15-21 | Doug Dortch

“Justified by Faith”

In these verses Paul begins to lay out his foundation of justification by faith – the belief that our standing before God is based on our trust in Him to have done for us in Jesus what none of us could have done by ourselves. This simple exposition of the gospel is what led Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, to call Paul’s letter to the Galatians “the gospel in miniature.”

What we can appreciate most is how Paul internalized this truth, applying it to his own life. In Paul’s way of thinking, the person he used to be was “crucified with Christ” and every day was marked by an “ongoing Incarnation” of Christ “living in him.”

Why not apply that truth to you own life? Why not see that your life is now marked by a power that does for you what you could never do for yourself? If you could save yourself, so could others. But if none of us can, then all of us are dependent on the grace of Christ. Rejoice in your new standing through your faith in the crucified and risen Jesus and in His power that works through you to help you experience the fullness of life He is even now redeeming you to know.

Saturday, June 18-Sunday, June 19 | Galatians 1:1-2:21

Reread Galatians 1:1-2:21 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK TWO: GALATIANS 3:1-4:31
JUNE 20-26

Monday, June 20 | Galatians 3:1-14 | Wayne Splawn

“Old habits die hard.”

This is surely a saying with which many of us are familiar. It resonates with many of us because it succinctly sums up the struggles many of us face when trying to leave behind an old way of thinking or an unhealthy habit. We often find that we experience short-term success when turning over a new leaf only to discover that we easily resort to past ways of thinking over time. Why do we struggle to leave behind ways of thinking that we know are detrimental? I think it is due to the fact that our habits and ways of thinking are more deeply ingrained in us than we would like to think. Adopting new, healthy habits requires one to constantly be on guard against old habits that inevitably seek to find their way back into our lives.

I think this is certainly true in our relationship with God. Most of us have a strong desire to be made right with God through our own efforts and obedience. We think that if we can just do this well enough or avoid certain sins, then surely God will be pleased with us. However, as we have already seen in the book of Galatians, no one will be justified before God (Galatians 2:16). Only through faith in Jesus can a person be made right with God.

Here in Galatians 3:1-14, Paul admonishes his audience to remember that they are saved by faith, not by works. They had started out in faith, but the message of the false teachers in Galatia appealed to their desire to do something to earn God's favor. Paul reminds them that they can only be saved by works of the law if they keep all things written in the law. They will not be graded on a curve. Perfect obedience is required to earn justification through the law and each of us knows that is impossible. Salvation is a gift from God not a wage paid to those who earn it.

Perhaps you struggle with a desire to earn God's favor through your own obedience. Yes, you have placed your faith in Christ for salvation, but from time to time you go back to your old ways of trying to earn something that God has already given you. If so, take some time today to thank God for the salvation you have been given through faith in Christ and ask the Lord to help you enjoy the rest that is yours. Confess your tendency to try and be justified through works and ask God to help you walk in the freedom that only comes through faith in Jesus.

Tuesday, June 21 | Galatians 3:15-29 | Wayne Splawn

How do you usually identify yourself to others? Perhaps you describe yourself as male or female. Maybe you would look first to your ethnicity, occupation, or nationality. These are certainly all
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WEEK TWO: GALATIANS 3:1-4:31 JUNE 20-26

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important parts of our sense of identity.

However, in Galatians 3:28-29, Paul writes that all of these identity markers have been superseded by the identity we have been given through faith in Jesus Christ. We do not cease to be male, female, Americans, Asians, etc. - but, these designations now take a back seat to our identity as those who are in Christ. This truth has significant implications for how we now relate to other Christians.

Will we have differences? Sure. Will there be areas of real disagreement that threaten to divide us? Absolutely. But, the common identity that we have been given in Jesus should be something that unites all of us who have confessed that Jesus is Lord.

Wednesday, June 22 | Galatians 4:1-7 | Wayne Splawn

Yesterday we looked at Galatians 3:15-29 and reflected on the truth that we are all one in Christ. No matter how different we are due to differences in our ethnicity, gender, or social status, those of us who have placed our faith in Christ now share a common identity in Him.

Here in Galatians 4:1-7, Paul helps us to further reflect on the way that our relationship with God and with other Christians has been transformed because of our faith in Christ. In this passage, Paul states that through Christ we have been adopted into God's family so that we can now address God as our Father. Not only that, but Paul also states that we are now sons of God and heirs of God.

Pause for just a moment and think about how staggering that truth is! Not only does God forgive us of our sins and declare us to be not guilty - He also adopts us into His family and allows us to address Him as Father. In his book *Knowing God*, theologian J.I. Packer writes the following regarding the privilege we have to call God our Father because of our faith in Jesus:

"To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is a greater." (p. 207)

Spend some time today in prayer thanking God that you have been adopted into His family through faith in Christ. Rejoice in the truth that you are loved and cared for by your Heavenly Father!

Thursday, June 23 | Galatians 4:8-20 | Wayne Splawn

One weekend when we were in seminary my wife, Mary, took a trip to South Carolina to visit family. Meanwhile, I stayed in Birmingham and worked a double shift at a restaurant in town to make some
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WEEK TWO: GALATIANS 3:1-4:31 JUNE 20-26

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extra money. I went home that night fully intending to go to church the next day.

When Sunday morning rolled around, I woke up and started my usual morning routine before heading out to church. However, when I looked at the clock, I noticed that it was already 11:30 a.m. I was so upset that I had slept through my alarm clock and missed church that day. To make matters worse, I went to a restaurant down the street and several people I knew from church came into the restaurant as well. I felt especially bad in the presence of other Christians who had faithfully gathered for worship that day.

As I thought about the reason I was upset that I had missed church, I realized that I was living as if my church attendance somehow earned me righteousness or favor with God. If I went to church, God was pleased. If I missed church, then God was upset with me. At this point in time, I could have correctly told you that my salvation was totally dependent upon Jesus Christ and not my obedience. However, I was living as if I somehow added to my salvation through my own obedience.

In our passage for today, we learn that the false teachers in Galatia were teaching the believers there that they needed to observe special days and seasons in order to be made right with God. Paul helpfully points out that such an approach to salvation only leads to slavery and a false sense of assurance before the Lord.

To what or to whom do you look for assurance before God? It may be that you know in your head that you are made right with God through faith in Christ, but you are living as if you can somehow earn God's favor by doing the right things. If this is the case, you will probably feel as if you are on a roller coaster ride in your relationship with God. On the days that you feel like you're doing pretty good, you will feel as if God approves of you. On days that you fail to measure up to your own standards, you will feel as if God is not pleased with you. Such an approach to being in relationship with God will not bring the peace and joy that Christ died for you to know.

Should we seek to obey the Lord? Absolutely. Will the path of obedience lead to greater joy in this life? Yes. However, you and I must be careful to distinguish between obeying the Lord out of gratitude for all that we have been given in Christ and seeking to obey in order to earn something from God.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK TWO: GALATIANS 3:1-4:31 JUNE 20-26

Friday, June 24 | Galatians 4:21-31 | Wayne Splawn

Have you ever been tempted to take matters into your own hands in order to ensure a preferred outcome in a given situation? Most of us have been faced with the challenge of trusting someone else to deliver on a promise rather than taking care of a situation on our own.

Here in Galatians 4:21-31, Paul uses the account of Sarah and Hagar to point out that we can only experience salvation if we trust in what God has accomplished for us in Christ rather than trying to be made right with God by our own effort to obey the law. In his commentary on Galatians, Timothy George helpfully points out that Paul's opponents had probably used the story of Sarah and Hagar to convince the Galatians that only those who were circumcised and obeyed the law truly belonged to the people of God. Paul takes the account of Sarah and Hagar to prove exactly the opposite point.

Sarah encouraged Abraham to take matters into his own hands by having a child with Hagar rather than trusting that God would make good on His promise to give them a child in due time. Paul uses this account to show the futility of our attempts to manufacture something that only God can provide. When it comes to our salvation, we are unable to take matters into our own hands. It is impossible for us to do anything to be made right with God. Instead, you and I are called to simply trust God's promise that he will save all of those who trust in what He has done on our behalf through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Saturday, June 25-Sunday, June 26 | Galatians 3:1-4:31

Reread Galatians 3:1-4:31 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK THREE: GALATIANS 5:1-6:18 JUNE 27-JULY 3

Monday, June 27 | Galatians 5:1-6 | Wayne Splawn

Here in Galatians 5:1-6, Paul presents the Galatians with two mutually exclusive options. They can either trust in Christ alone for their salvation or they can submit to the teaching of the false teachers in Galatia and become circumcised in keeping with the Mosaic law. But, Paul wants to make sure that they understand what is at stake in this decision. Should they decide to be circumcised in keeping with the law, they must be prepared to keep the whole law, which Paul knows is impossible.

All people today are faced with the same decision. We must either embrace the salvation that is available to us by grace through faith in Christ or we must try to earn God's approval through good works and obedience. If we even briefly consider these options and our own ability to obey God's law in our own power, we quickly realize there is no option at all. Left to our own devices you and I have no hope of earning God's favor. Instead, we must rejoice in the fact that Christ has fully met the requirements of the law on our behalf through His life, death, and resurrection. All we can do is place our faith in Jesus and rejoice in the salvation and freedom that God has so graciously granted to us!

Tuesday, June 28 | Galatians 5:7-15 | Wayne Splawn

Yesterday, in Galatians 5:1-6, we saw that Christ has set us free from the law. Many people have thought about this truth and arrived at the conclusion that salvation by grace through faith might lead people to think that they can live any way they choose since their salvation is not dependent upon their behavior. Paul addresses this issue here in Galatians 5:7-15, especially in verses 13-15.

Why would people who have been saved by grace not become involved in all manner of sinful behaviors? The answer Paul provides here is love. That is, Christians seek to live our lives in a manner that is consistent with God's will because we love the Lord and other people who have been created in His image. Rather than using the freedom we enjoy through faith in Christ as an opportunity for the flesh, Christians are motivated to conform our lives to God's will because of our love for God and our fellow man. Anyone who would use the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ as an excuse to disobey God's commands has not yet come to a true understanding of the love that God has shown us in Christ.

Wednesday, June 29 | Galatians 5:16-26 | Wayne Splawn

In Galatians 5:16-26, Paul continues his discussion of obedience by focusing on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer. In these verses, Paul contrasts the way of the flesh with the way of the Spirit. The way of the flesh leads to all types of sinful behaviors mentioned in Galatians 5:18-21. The way of the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, (continued on next page)



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK THREE: GALATIANS 5:1-6:18 JUNE 27-JULY 3

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and self-control in the lives of those who have been united with Christ through faith.

The thing I find fascinating about these verses is the way in which Paul encourages believers to walk by and stay in step with the Spirit. It is the role of the Spirit to lead us and produce the fruit of righteousness. However, we are not passive bystanders in this. You and I have an obligation to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to stay in step with Him.

As you go throughout your day today, be sensitive to the Spirit's leading in your life. Make a conscious effort to walk in step with the Spirit. Should you be confused about which way the Spirit is leading, ask God to help empower you to do that which is most consistent with the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23.

Thursday, June 30 | Galatians 6:1-10 | Wayne Splawn

I am not a farmer by any stretch of the imagination. The closest I have ever been to farming is growing some tomatoes and peppers in containers in my backyard. However, I am familiar enough with farming to know that it involves a lot of hard work and I have a lot of respect for the men and women who do the hard work necessary to see the growing process through from planting to harvest.

Paul uses this agricultural imagery to challenge the Galatians to faithfully fulfill the calling God has given them to daily live in step with the Spirit. Some days they will no doubt be tempted to take the easy way out and live according to the principles of the flesh rather than the Spirit. And, as they have already experienced due to the pressure of the false teachers in their midst, they will occasionally be pressured to conform to the ways of the world rather than walk in obedience to the Lord. In the midst of such challenging seasons, Paul encourages them to remember that one day there will be a harvest for those who have kept in step with the Spirit.

Perhaps you need to be reminded of that truth today. You may be faced with the temptation to go the way of the world. It may seem as if the struggle to obediently pursue Jesus Christ will be more trouble than it is worth. If that is the case, then be reminded anew of the truth that in due season you will reap a harvest of righteousness that can only be experienced by those who faithfully seek to walk in God's ways in the power of the Holy Spirit. Do not grow weary in doing good.

Friday, July 1 | Galatians 6:11-18 | Wayne Splawn

Boasting is usually a very unattractive thing. No one likes to listen to another person brag about their
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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK THREE: GALATIANS 5:1-6:18 JUNE 27-JULY 3

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ability to excel in a particular area. Instead of boasting and bragging, most of us would prefer to see someone genuinely grateful for the gifts and talents with which they have been blessed by the Lord. There is something very attractive about someone who possesses genuine humility.

In Galatians 6:11-18, the Apostle Paul concludes his letter to the Galatians with a word about boasting. Paul states that he will not boast in anything other than the cross of Jesus Christ. He has spent the majority of this letter explaining the truth that people can only be justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We will not be saved because of our ethnicity, social status, or citizenship. We will not earn God's favor because of our obedience. Because of this we are people who have no reason to boast in anything in and of ourselves. Instead, if we boast, we ought to boast in the cross of Christ. May we increasingly be a group of people who understand and live our lives in light of the gospel and take every opportunity we are given to boast in Jesus Christ!

Saturday, July 2-Sunday, July 3 | Galatians 5:1-6:18

Reread Galatians 5:1-6:18 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK FOUR: EPHESIANS 1:1-2:22 JULY 4-10

Monday, July 4 | Ephesians 1:1-10 | Hayden Walker

Today we begin a new epistle. Paul wrote this letter, as he was imprisoned in Rome, to the churches in Ephesus. Ephesus was an important city in the ancient world. A booming metropolis and seaport, Ephesus was a hub of activity, trade, and pluralism. Not only was it an important city to the Empire, but it was also a significant place to Paul. During his missionary journeys, he spent three years in Ephesus. This group of people was dear to him and he wanted them to be reminded of the truth of the gospel, which he had taught them. The letter clearly and concisely outlines the gospel and the implications it has on our everyday lives.

After a few introductory remarks, Paul bursts into praise, explaining that God is orchestrating unity of all things (Ephesians 1:10) through the redemption granted by Christ (Ephesians 1:7). This means that all will be made right, all will be restored because of Jesus. The redemption that His blood has purchased is the cause for this great praise. Nothing can stifle Paul, not even his imprisonment.

Are you as amazed by this redemption? I fear that we have lost some of the weight associated with the word "redemption." We are beckoned to redeem airline miles or to redeem a voucher at a store. The word has been cheapened in our vocabulary so that perhaps we are no longer captivated and driven to praise when we hear that we have redemption in Christ.

Jesus redeemed us by His blood (Ephesians 1:7), a trade of immeasurable cost. By using the word redemption, Paul is likely drawing upon the Old Testament image of Israel being freed from slavery in Egypt. It is liberation language, freedom from bondage. If you are in Christ, you have been liberated because of the blood of Christ. You now belong to God. This redemption allows believers to live in unity with God. The theme of unity will continue to be explored in later chapters of Ephesians, but it all begins with God making a way, through Christ, for humanity live in unity with Himself. Praise be to God!

Tuesday, July 5 | Ephesians 1:11-14 | Hayden Walker

Can you think of someone you know who is both eloquent and long-winded? Even if their thoughts are comprehensible, their sentences are lengthy! Our passage today is actually still part of one sentence, which Paul began in verse three! His praise paragraph began with worshipping the Father (Ephesians 1:3) moved to the Son (Ephesians 1:7) and concludes in our passage today with the Spirit (Ephesians 1:11). His praise of God continues to pour out of his soul.
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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK FOUR: EPHESIANS 1:1-2:22

JULY 4-10

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It was so natural for Paul to praise God despite his circumstances. His praise isn't manufactured or strained. It came naturally as he pondered the great redeeming work of God. He was not sitting in prison counting his woes, but instead he continued to worship!!

He worshipped because believers in Christ are God's possession. Our society values branded items: clothing, cars, jewelry, sporting equipment, etc. Sometimes it is just for prestige, but some items of a certain brand are understood to be better products than others. The brand sets the item apart.

In a similar way, God has marked believers (Ephesians 1:13). We who believe are "branded" by God, showing that we belong to Him. This mark is the seal of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit assures believers that we do indeed belong to God and that all the promises of God are true and will indeed be realized, despite our present circumstances.

Wednesday, July 6 | Ephesians 1:15-23 | Hayden Walker

In this section, Paul explains to the believers in Ephesus how he is praying for them. We could spend much time going over this portion, but I'd like to focus on the end of the passage.

In ancient cultures, it was customary for rulers to have statues built of themselves to place throughout their empires. These images were intended to demonstrate the power of the ruler and citizens were often forced to worship them. Perhaps you remember Nebuchadnezzar building a golden statue in Daniel chapter three. The refusal to worship the image landed Daniel's three friends in a fiery furnace. This practice of statue building and worship continued into the Greco-Roman world.

In AD 98, Trajan became the Roman emperor. An imposing statue was constructed right in the middle of Ephesus in his honor. The portion of this statue that can be seen in Ephesus today is his large foot. Under Trajan's foot is an orb, representing the world. This was meant to demonstrate that everything in the whole world was under the authority of the emperor. It is a declaration of sovereignty, deity, and power.

As Christians saw this imposing statue being assembled, surely they were reminded of the words of Paul in Ephesians 1:22 which had been written only a few decades prior. The world was not under Trajan's feet, not under Rome's feet, but under Christ's feet. The risen Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, and *all* authority in heaven and on earth truly has been given to Him. All things are under his jurisdiction.

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK FOUR: EPHESIANS 1:1-2:22 JULY 4-10

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You may feel today that your world is spinning out of control. Your present situation, or situations around the world may tempt you to believe that God has forgotten about us. He has not forgotten, nor is He impotent. Jesus is in control. Your world, in fact, the whole world, is under His watchful care.

Thursday, July 7 | Ephesians 2:1-10 | Hayden Walker

It is difficult to overestimate the depth of human depravity portrayed in Ephesians 2:1-3. Not only were we enthralled by the world, not only were we following Satan, we were **dead**. This death was not physical of course, but it is no less real. Spiritually, those apart from Christ are dead. You and I were dead. Our hearts had not yet been brought to life by the power of Christ.

Paul interrupts this terrible news with two great words: But God.

While we were sinners, while we were dead, Christ in His great mercy died for us. He did this out of His love for us, not because we had anything to offer Him. It was completely a one-way gift. Jesus did not save any of us because of what we can do for Him. He didn't save us because we needed a little help to become better people. He redeemed us because of His vast love for us, even while we were dead.

The gospel isn't really good news until it has been bad news. It does not astound us that Jesus can make us alive until we grasp that we are truly dead apart from Him. As one pastor put it, Jesus didn't come to make bad people good, he came to make dead people alive!

The proper response to this good news then is to actually live as people who are alive. As Paul explains, we do this by living into the good works which Christ has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10). Works do not earn salvation - they are a joyous response to salvation! How can you serve Jesus today, making much of Him who made you alive?

Friday, July 8 | Ephesians 2:11-22 | Hayden Walker

A major theme of the book of Ephesians is unity. So far in the letter, we have seen two different types: unity between God and humanity, and the unity of all creation under the feet of Christ. God has allowed believers to be in unity with Him because of the redemption paid by the blood of Christ. God raised Jesus to a place of victory over all powers and authorities, promising unity in all creation.

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK FOUR: EPHESIANS 1:1-2:22 JULY 4-10

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This theological perspective on unity shows that our reconciliation must first come from God. No unity can exist apart from Him. However, Paul does not allow us to remain only within the realm of divine unity. In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul teaches that believers must live in unity with one another.

There was much dissension in the early church between Gentile believers and believers with a Jewish heritage. Paul is quick to remind them (and us!) that they all were dead and separated from God. Though they shared a different bloodline, they all had a common connection to Jesus: they were estranged before they met Him! Because God made peace with them, Paul urges believers to live in unity with one another. All believers are now members of one household (Ephesians 2:19). There is no place for discord in the household of God.

Take some time today to ask God how you might be living in dissonance with others. What relationships need peace in your life? How can you go about reflecting the unity that you have with God to others?

Saturday, July 9-Sunday, July 10 | Ephesians 1:1-2:22

Reread Ephesians 1:1-2:22 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK FIVE: EPHESIANS 3:1-4:32 JULY 11-17

Monday, July 11 | Ephesians 3:1-13 | Mary Splawn

This portion of Scripture begins and ends with a recognition that Paul is in jail. One of the silver lining benefits of being in jail is that there is lots of time to write. And, thankfully Paul had the supplies he needed to write letters to churches and individuals, which by the sovereign power of God have been preserved for instruction in the church for two millennium.

It is very ironic that Paul is in jail for the sake of the gospel because we read in Acts 8 that approximately 25 years earlier, Saul (also known as Paul) is a Christian-persecuting Jew who threw Christians into prison. Yet, Acts 9 recounts Paul's dramatic conversion. The passage says that Paul is blinded and questioned by Jesus on the way to Damascus. Next, a man named Ananias is instructed by the Lord to go to Paul and to place his hands on him so Paul will regain his sight! The Lord tells Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15).

Now in this letter to Gentiles, Paul encourages the Ephesians not to be distracted or discouraged by his sufferings because he was chosen to suffer much for their sake! In Ephesians 3:13, Paul says that his imprisonment is actually their glory! Elsewhere in letters written by Paul while he was in prison, he clarifies this idea. In Philippians 1:12-13, Paul says that his imprisonment has served to advance the gospel because those with political power have heard the good news and other Christians have become bolder in their witness to Jesus. In 2 Timothy 2:9, Paul emphatically reminds Timothy that while he is bound in chains like a criminal, the word of God can not be bound! In other words, the word about Christ is going forth in spite of Paul's chains or, dare I say, because of them.

Paul asks his readers to stay focused on the mission of the church: spreading the unsearchable riches of Christ to the world around them. Two thousand years later, we still have this same mission to share the good news about Jesus. And, we serve the same God who can use whatever circumstances and individuals He chooses!

As Paul encourages the Ephesians, in Christ, we approach God's throne as sons and daughters with confidence, asking for the Lord's help in making the message of Christ clear to those around us (Ephesians 3:12).

Lord, would You make us Your chosen instruments to carry the message of Christ to those in our neighborhoods, workplaces, families, and friend groups? Amen.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK FIVE: EPHESIANS 3:1-4:32 JULY 11-17

Tuesday, July 12 | Ephesians 3:14-20 | Mary Splawn

My daughter has a Power Wheels vehicle. It is a lot of fun to play with...until its battery goes dead. Then we have to plug it into a power source to recharge. Three times in these verses, Paul mentions power. First in Ephesians 3:16, he prays for the power of the Spirit that sustains faith. Then in Ephesians 3:18, he intercedes for the people to have the power to understand the expanse of God's love. And then in Ephesians 3:20, he asks for God's power to be at work in believers to do greater things than they could imagine. It is evident that in each intercession, power comes from taking time to plug into our relationship with God.

I'd like to highlight three other places where the power of God is provided! First, in Luke 1:35, Gabriel tells Mary that she will give birth to Jesus. He says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God." The same powerful God who conceived Jesus is still at work in us creating, sustaining, and providing us with understanding and faith.

Spiritual power is also mentioned at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Luke 4:14 says that "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit." Interestingly, Jesus has just returned from His tempting in the wilderness, where He didn't display physical power to overcome the devil - rather He fights temptation with the powerful Word of God. The same powerful Word of God helps us to know our Savior and to overcome temptation.

Finally, in Luke 24:49, right before Jesus ascends to heaven, the theme of power resurfaces. Jesus tells His disciples to "stay in the city until [they] have been clothed with power from on high." The power from the Spirit helped the disciples be witnesses of Christ to the world! This same Spirit that empowered the first disciples still works in us for the glory of the Lord.

Yet, often we don't acknowledge, appreciate, or appropriate this power. We do not take time to plug in and recharge in the presence of our Lord. If this is the case for you, start anew today! Pray that the power of God would be evident in your life.

Wednesday, July 13 | Ephesians 4:1-10 | Mary Splawn

Sometimes when we read Scripture it is good to just notice what we notice. We can do this by asking the text some questions like: What words and ideas stick out? Are there repeated themes? Does something in the passage remind me of a current situation?

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK FIVE: EPHESIANS 3:1-4:32

JULY 11-17

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When I have time to contemplate Scripture, I like to do it with a pen in hand, circling words that stand out and underlining groups of words or verses that resonate with me. The first word I circled in this passage was “urge.”

When we urge someone, it is typically because their natural tendency is to do something else. For example, I urge my children often to say “yes ma’am” because their first inclination is to say “yeah.” Paul urges Christians to walk in a manner worthy of their calling because the tendency is to revert to a manner that isn’t worthy of the name CHRISTian.

So what is worthy living? Paul gives us some ideas in verses two and three. Here they are in adjective form: humble, gentle, patient, supportive, unifiable.

In this passage, I also circled one word a lot because it was repeated eight times. You guessed it: it’s the word “one.” What do you think Paul is trying to imply by repeating this word? Through repetition, Paul reminds us that oneness is the goal of the church. We are to strive to be a unified force for bringing the gospel news to the world. And, we do this because we share “one” hope. This hope is defined in the first question and answer of the New City Catechism, a great teaching tool for faith. It reads, “Question: What is our only hope in life and death? Answer: That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ!”

Thursday, July 14 | Ephesians 4:11-16 | Mary Splawn

In these six verses, Paul talks about how God has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers to prepare the people of God for works of service. The goal of the work of those in Christian service is to build up the body of Christ, helping people to become unified in mission and mature in Christ.

To clarify, Paul gives a word picture of what a Christian without mission and maturity looks like. He or she is like an object in the sea tossed to and fro by the waves, blown by the wind here and there. This someone is all over the place, never grounded in mission, and easily distracted from the things of God! Ever been there?

Some days I feel like I am this way - unable to concentrate on knowing Christ and making Him known because my mind is preoccupied with so many varied things! What is it that keeps you from focusing on Christ? Is it material pleasure? Is it an object that turns on and off? Is it worry over the thoughts of others? Is it hurt feelings? Is it need for approval or love? Is it lack of a plan for growing in faith? Is it
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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK FIVE: EPHESIANS 3:1-4:32 JULY 11-17

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just plain busyness? Ask the Lord to reveal areas of growth to you.

In Ephesians 4:16, Paul gives some encouragement to the immature - "grow up." Put it nicely, Paul! (That was a joke.) Paul urges believers to live worthy of the calling and he explains why in this verse. Using the image of a body, Paul says all parts need to be working properly so that the body can grow and flourish. If one part isn't working, all suffer. And, to put it positively, if all systems are working effectively, awesome feats can be accomplished.

Ask the Lord to help you notice what distracts you today. Also, ask the Lord to help you think deeply about the metaphors of the object in the sea and the body as they relate to faith and mission of the church.

Lord, We do not want to be like bottles floating in the sea, tossed to and fro, rather, we want the Christian church to be like a working body, with every joint, ligament, organ, and system leading us in a manner worthy of our calling.

Friday, July 15 | Ephesians 4:17-32 | Haley Fenn

In this passage Paul explains that we are called to conduct ourselves as children of God. The series of verses embodies what it means to put off our old, corrupted self "and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self." (Ephesians 4:23-24)

While on the surface these verses might be looking to distinguish Christian versus non-Christian lifestyles, Paul begins to show us that living the Christian life is a process. A lifestyle includes both beliefs and behaviors – two very difficult things to change overnight. We are reminded that will not automatically change, but by listening to God we can develop over time.

We are so often filled with conflict, anger, and bitterness. Paul is reminding us how we are to resolve conflict in God's way. Ephesians 4:26-27 says, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." This verse stuck out to me as I remembered another quote: "If we nurse our anger, we will give Satan an opportunity to divide us." We should deal with conflict such as anger immediately in a way that builds relationships rather than destroys them.

As we reflect on the passage as a whole we are called to live passionately, resolve conflicts, and speak the truth in the way that God has taught us. Demonstrating the Christian lifestyle is an essential part of
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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK FIVE: EPHESIANS 3:1-4:32 JULY 11-17

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our faith. However it is not for just one person to do alone, but for us all to do as the body of Christ. Let us build up our brothers and sisters so that they can help and support us too.

Lord, help us to let go of the bitterness, anger, and jealousy that we are filled with. Help us to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Note: Haley Fenn is working as an intern for the Women's Ministry this summer. She is a student at Baylor University. Haley and her family have been members of Mountain Brook Baptist Church for seven years.

Saturday, July 16-Sunday, July 17 | Ephesians 3:1-4:32

Reread Ephesians 3:1-4:32 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK SIX: EPHESIANS 5:1-6:24 JULY 18-24

Monday, July 18 | Ephesians 5:1-21 | Stephen Fryrear

My wife Carleigh and I have been doing a lot of work around the house lately. Becoming a first-time homeowner has forced me to become "almost handy." I have replaced fans, light fixtures, and way too many electrical switches and plugs over these last few weeks. The projects are easy; the most difficult part is just being in the dark. I almost died one evening (yes, I was replacing a fan at night with the electricity cut off...it was really dark!) walking back to one of these dark rooms when I tripped over my tool bag! I forgot that I put it in the middle of the hallway.

It is dangerous to walk without light! That's what Paul says in the passage we read today. He was encouraging the believers in Ephesus to be imitators of God. What stuck out to me is how often he used the word "walk." Walking is an active term; believers shouldn't be standing still waiting for Jesus' return, but until He comes we should be actively spreading His glorious gospel. We share many same life experiences as our friends, family, and neighbors who don't know Christ - we walk the same paths as them, but we should walk differently.

Walk in Love. Our lives should reflect the love of Christ "who gave himself up for us" and look different being marked by thanksgiving! Look around; the world is full of enough cynicism, anger, and hatred. "The will know we are Christians by our love, by our love..." - I can still hear my mom singing that song today.

Walk as Children of Light. Paul drills into us our new identity in Christ, we were "dead" but now "alive" - "...in which you once were" and here he says, "for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." We don't take part in activities in the dark anymore; we are children of the light!

Walk Wisely. The days are evil and dangerous so we have to be on guard - not with our wisdom but God's wisdom from His word.

So let us walk wisely with eyes open, not in darkness but in His glorious light to love the world around us and point them to Jesus.

Tuesday, July 19 | Ephesians 5:22-33 | Stephen Fryrear

I love weddings, everything about them! The music, the food, the cakes, the party, the people, all of that stuff is so fun, but the part of the wedding that gets me most amped is the exchanging of vows. Huge promises being made here! "For better for worse, forsaking all others, 'til death do us part..." - (continued on next page)



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK SIX: EPHESIANS 5:1-6:24 JULY 18-24

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these are big time commitments. Marriage has definitely lost its rightful place of importance in our society. Marriage is not just a social agreement between two consenting adults to join bank accounts, raise kids, and be forever roommates - no! It is of importance of cosmic proportions! Marriage is the way that God chose to show the world who He is and how He loves us!

In Ephesians 5:31 of today's passage, Paul quotes from all the way back in Genesis 2:24. This verse is often read during a wedding ceremony about leaving your father and mother becoming one flesh with your wife, but in Ephesians 5:32 he drops a bomb, "...it refers to Christ and the church." That must mean that, from the foundations of the world, God designed marriage to be an earthly picture of His love for us. We, the Church, are the (unfaithful) "Bride of Christ," for whom Jesus paid the ultimate dowry for in order that we could be with Him forever. At the beginning of this chapter Paul encouraged us to imitators of God, and one way to do that is through our marriages.

Our marriages should show the world around us that **God is faithful**. We reflect the truth that our God is a faithful, covenant-keeping God when we honor and are faithful to our spouses. Our marriages also show that **God is full of grace**. When we show radical grace to our spouses and forgive even when it isn't deserved we point the world to a God who is rich in mercy and grace. Marriage also reflects that **we need Jesus**. I realized this more than ever my first year of marriage. I'm not the perfect husband! I can't be perfectly forgiving, patient and loving, but Jesus can. Call on Him "who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

Be encouraged today! You can love your spouse because Christ loves you more. You can forgive and show grace because Christ forgave you of your sins! If you feel alone, know that's not true. Christ will never leave His bride! Praise God!

Wednesday, July 20 | Ephesians 6:1-9 | Stephen Fryrear

This is a tough passage! When Paul writes, "Slaves obey your earthly masters," does that mean that Paul (and the Bible) are condoning slavery? By no means! Unfortunately, because we live in a fallen world, people get horribly taken advantage of and the practice of slavery has existed throughout history. The age of the early church was no different, but the New Testament did have regulations for what were societal norms of the time. That's what we see here in this passage, Paul is giving practical advice to those who find themselves in these societal situations of being a "bondservant," or slave.

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK SIX: EPHESIANS 5:1-6:24 JULY 18-24

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It's important to note that, just in the previous chapter, Paul called believers to "be imitators of God." (Ephesians 5:1) I think he might be continuing examples of how to live like Christ. But this is radical! What if, like in marriage, this could be a way to point the world to the love of Christ: "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men"? (Ephesians 6:7).

Is there an example of when Jesus was obedient even when given a terrible task? Look at Philippians 2:8: "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

The truth is we were all slaves. Jesus' obedience to die in our place on the cross broke our chains of slavery to sin! No longer are we slaves to sin but "slaves of righteousness." (Romans 6:18) And our Master's yoke is easy and burden is light! God, would you give us obedience to daily battle sin in our lives, and to proclaim that it is not our master anymore? We are Yours!

Thursday, July 21 | Ephesians 6:10-20 | Stephen Fryrear

I had one of these, the whole suit! The kit came complete with the flimsy plastic helmet, a sword, and breastplate of righteousness that barely fit around my husky childhood frame. It never did feel very "protective." I would have felt better with a "BB gun of atonement" and a "baseball bat of justification." Oh, but now I have come understand the power of the "sword of the Spirit" and have realized that it is more useful against my real enemy than any BB gun ever could be.

In the passage we read today Paul encourages us to put on "the whole armor of God." The reading today comes right after the passage instructing slaves to obey their masters as in service to Christ. Before that, Paul has been encouraging the church to be imitators of God in so many different ways. Impossible! This is too hard. We can't do this on our own, precisely. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." We can't do it, but God can.

Cover yourself with God! As the hymn says, "When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see him there, who made an end to all my sin." (From "Before the Throne of God Above"). The breastplate of His righteousness will protect your trembling heart! When the flaming arrows of doubt have been launched against you, hold tight to the shield of faith. Remember, our enemy is not flesh and bones, but the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms! Fight spirit with Spirit, the Word of God which is the Sword of the Spirit! Pray in the Spirit, with all kinds of prayers and requests. God is with you and fighting for you!

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK SIX: EPHESIANS 5:1-6:24 JULY 18-24

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Let us pray like Paul, asking for the ability to fearlessly proclaim the gospel as we should, because we know that Satan is already annihilated. He was killed at the cross! Praise God!

Friday, July 22 | Ephesians 6:21-24 | Stephen Fryrear

“Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.” Grace! We need grace! Paul knows that we can never be imitators of God in our own strength. God knows that we will fail, but when we do, we will fall on His grace. Today, I pray you have “peace” resting in the truth that the grace of God is sufficient for you!

Meditate or sing the words of this song today.

“Lord I Need You”

2011 Carson, Maher, Nockels, Reeves, Stanfill

Lord, I come, I confess
Bowing here I find my rest
Without You I fall apart
You're the One that guides my heart

Where sin runs deep Your grace is more
Where grace is found is where You are
And where You are, Lord, I am free
Holiness is Christ in me

Lord, I need You, Oh, I need You
Every hour I need You
My one defense, my righteousness
Oh God, how I need You

Teach my song to rise to You
When temptation comes my way
And when I cannot stand I'll fall on You
Jesus, You're my hope and stay

Saturday, July 23-Sunday, July 24 | Ephesians 5:1-6:24

Reread Ephesians 5:1-6:24 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK SEVEN: PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2:30 JULY 25-31

Monday, July 25 | Philippians 1:1-11 | Courtney Trotter

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians while in prison, most likely in Rome, around AD 62. Philippi was an important Roman colony along the Egnatian Way, a commercial road that connected Europe with Asia. Up until this point, Paul's ministry was focused primarily in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), but after experiencing a call from the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6-5), Paul and his companions moved on to Macedonia (modern-day Greece) during his second missionary journey. Philippi was his first stop after this new calling, and therefore the first church that he planted in Europe. There were many notable events from this first encounter recorded in Acts 16, such as the conversion of Lydia the seller of purple goods, the exorcism of a demon from a fortune-telling slave girl, Silas and Paul's miraculous release from prison, and the conversion of the Philippian jailor. As a result of this brief period spent in Philippi, Paul made many lasting connections with the church which would continue to support him and provide encouragement throughout the rest of his ministry.

This is by far Paul's most uplifting letter to a church which reflects its overarching purpose. He wants to encourage the Philippians in their faith and thank them for their generous gift. They no doubt have conflicts (see Philippians 4:2), but they seem to be a healthy congregation, not in need of strong correction like the churches in Corinth or Galatia. Nonetheless they cannot be content with their current progress. God is continuing to work through them and he will bring it to completion. He prays that they will abound all the more in love that overflows with knowledge and discernment so that the fruit of their faith will bring glory to God.

Paul's prayer emphasizes joy, gospel partnerships, and spiritual growth. May we go throughout today with an attitude of joy, thankful that God is working in us through even the most difficult circumstances. Also, thank God for the faithful people that He has placed in your life – those partnerships that remind us of the gospel of Christ. And may we seek to grow in our love, knowledge, and discernment in order to bring glory and praise to God.

Tuesday, July 26 | Philippians 1:12-30 | Courtney Trotter

This section of Philippians reminds me of the story of Joseph. Joseph experienced many hardships in his life. His brothers tried to kill him and then decided to sell him into slavery. While in Egypt, he was thrown into prison, but eventually his fortune began to shift. He was summoned to interpret dreams for the Pharaoh and then became one of his trusted advisors. As a result of his position of authority, he was able to give aid to his family, the same brothers who previously tried to kill him, during a famine. His brothers feared that he might try to exact revenge on them, but he assured them saying, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK SEVEN: PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2:30 JULY 25-31

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Paul has this same confidence in the power of God. Joseph said this in hindsight, but Paul is able to proclaim hope in the midst of his trouble. He faced two main problems. The first was the fact that he was in prison which greatly restricted his ability to function as a traveling evangelist. The second is that there was group of people, probably pagans, who were disparaging his reputation. In spite of all this, he is able to rejoice. For he knows that he will be delivered and the kingdom of God will advance whether he lives or dies.

Everyone wants to live and death is inevitable. But there is only one way to have a life worth living and a death worth dying: to look to the one who lived a perfect life and claimed victory over death. It is this hope and joy that becomes the sign of the Christian, unites us for the sake of the gospel, and allows us to stand firm in the face of opposition (Philippians 1:27-28). Pray that God will give you joy in the midst of sorrow. Look back on your life and thank God for the times that He worked good out of seemingly insurmountable problems.

Wednesday, July 27 | Philippians 2:1-11 | Courtney Trotter

This passage is the heart of the letter as Paul describes how to be a servant leader, which was just as counter-cultural in his time as it is today. Leadership by society's standards is so often a power struggle by those looking for recognition and using whatever means possible to end up on top. Our civic leaders are called public servants but so often they look out for their own interests, making sure they don't lose their status, instead of being advocates for the people they represent. For me this style of leadership is clearly illustrated in the television show *Shark Tank*. The name says it all. If you are not ruthless, cutthroat, and a little bit arrogant you will never see success in this world. The humble will be eaten by the sharks out there.

People are also driven to serve for the wrong reasons, such as guilt, obligation, or pride. Even if we serve others out of a sense of compassion, that concern will eventually fade as our lives become filled with busyness or our own hardships. The Bible provides a radically different picture of service and leadership.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Leader of the whole world, came as a servant in humility, sacrificing Himself for others. It was His humility that led to His exaltation. This is the leadership that Paul calls us to imitate throughout the letter of Philippians. Only after we understand the character of God can we be committed to Him in service. We might be called to a difficult task and not see success in this life, but if we are faithful servants of the Faithful Servant we will be exalted with Christ in
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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK SEVEN: PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2:30 JULY 25-31

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eternity. There must be a supernatural basis for our service; otherwise we will not endure the suffering, opposition, discouragement, and hardship that follow. Pray for the opportunity to serve others as Christ has served you.

Thursday, July 28 | Philippians 2:12-18 | Courtney Trotter

How do you continue on after the magnificent Christ hymn of Philippians 2:6-11? By beginning with “therefore,” Paul shows that the awe-inspiring truths of the hymn are inextricably connected with practical commands that follow. The humility of Christ gives Christians a model for spiritual maturation. Paul begins by encouraging the Philippians who have always obeyed and then exhorts them to continue to do so. Likewise, we should take hold of our faith by doing these three things.

First, we should work out our faith with fear and trembling. Philippians 2:12 is often misunderstood to mean that Christians work to earn their salvation. Or that “God helps those who helps themselves” (which is, in fact, not in the Bible). Actually, Paul is stressing that they need to take responsibility for their spiritual welfare even if he is not with them. It is easy to show dedication in public, but it is altogether more challenging to remain faithful when no one is watching. Christians are called to a lifetime of obedience and discipline. It is indeed quite a process to grow into Christ-likeness.

Second, we should be shining witnesses in a spiritually dark world. Then, Paul tell us that, in order to shine, we must not complain. It seems odd that Paul would link these two together. Our speech, however, distinctly sets us apart. If our conversation is blameless and pure, it points to Christ who was the blameless and pure sacrifice for our sins. Instead of complaining we should be proclaiming the word of life.

Third, we should rejoice in sacrificial service. Just as Christ emptied himself, Paul is happy to shed his blood for the sake of the gospel. We should also be willing to imitate Paul’s example and give ourselves as a glad offering to the church in service.

May God rekindle a passion in us for day-to-day obedience. May our speech spill over with the words of life. And may we rejoice in service to one another.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK SEVEN: PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2:30 JULY 25-31

Friday, July 29 | Philippians 2:19-30 | Courtney Trotter

At first glance, it seems that Paul only wants to give updates on travel plans for himself and his friends which would be an odd aside from the rest of the letter. But Timothy and Epaphroditus are mentioned because they exemplify the Christ-centered humility that Paul is encouraging the Philippians to live. Paul sends Timothy as a placeholder for him while he is in prison. Timothy is a pastor, but his main qualification for the office is rather puzzling. Paul does not mention that he is a wonderful teacher and preacher, that he is a holy man, that he has a firm grasp on the scriptures, or that he spent many years working and ministering with him on the mission field. What qualifies Timothy for gospel service is his genuine concern for the Philippians' welfare more than his own. He is a true disciple, living out Jesus' command, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Epaphroditus has also followed the path of Christ in Philippians 2:1-11. As Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). He was willing to die for the work of Christ. He was willing to sacrifice it all to bring aide to a friend, Paul, in prison. He also has not sought his own welfare, but that of others. And he too is a visible reminder of Christ Jesus our Lord. Why has Paul spent the majority of this letter giving examples of the faith? Because we need to see that God is working in the lives of others when we, like Paul in Philippians 2:27, are overwhelmed with sorrow. We all have people in our lives who have mentored us and invested in our faith. God has given us these living examples so that we can be daily reminded of His power (Revelation 12:11).

Saturday, July 30-Sunday, July 31 | Philippians 1:1-2:30

Reread Philippians 1:1-2:30 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK EIGHT: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-4:23 AUGUST 1-7

Monday, August 1 | Philippians 3:1-11 | Alvin Pelton

"Rejoice in the Lord." Rejoice in Him - not in your circumstances. Paul even says, "It's easy for me to write this to you." What an astounding statement considering he is chained to a guard night and day. No doubt Paul's Roman citizenship afforded some small benefit but it was still house arrest. Through this captive audience, which came daily and rotated every six hours, the most unique plan for evangelizing the Roman empire began. We can even see the outcome in the last chapter of the book... "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household."

So, how does a person move beyond the difficult or even impossible circumstances to a place of rejoicing? Woven throughout the New Testament we hear Paul's testimony and therein we will find the answer. The imagery he uses may change but the message remains the same. In 2 Corinthians 2:14, Paul tells us that he was conquered and even taken captive by the love of Christ and he willingly became the Lord's slave...possessing nothing of his own. In our reading today he paints his testimony using accounting terms. The entire ledger of what he once counted as valuable (the right family, the right school, the right political/religious connections) amount to nothing. All of the advantages and privileges once considered as profit are now, for the sake of Christ, loss. What is of worth? Paul says, "...that I might gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes through the law but through faith in Christ."

In addition to rejoicing there comes a warning, people to "watch out for..." There were those individuals who wanted to add the legal requirements of Judaism to the Gentiles who wanted to become believers. In essence Paul is telling us to beware of any message or messenger that says Christ's offering is not enough.

From time to time it is worth asking where our confidence lies. Do we think that God loves us because of all that we do for Him or do we know that God loves us because of what Jesus Christ did for us? His gift was perfect and we can contribute nothing to it. His gift cannot be improved upon nor can it be diminished. His gift is flawless and eternal.

Tuesday, August 2 | Philippians 3:12-16 | Alvin Pelton

Paul writes this letter in the middle of the Greco-Roman world and those people were striving for perfection through intellectual and spiritual enlightenment. Our writer had encountered that false teaching before and here he is saying, "I've not obtained this perfection and I'm not already perfect." Even with all his accomplishments he was still striving for a higher goal and he knew flawless (continued on next page)



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK EIGHT: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-4:23 AUGUST 1-7

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perfection could only be found in one place and that was “in Christ and in His righteousness.”

All through our Mountain Brook hills and curves we see runners among us and even in the dead of winter they are faithfully pounding the ground. In the Isthmian games, which were held every two years in Corinth, the runners fixed their eyes on the post marking the end-point of the race and the winner was awarded a crown of dried celery. Paul runs a race also and he says, “...but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” In Philippians 2:16 he admonishes us to run for something worthwhile - “...don’t run for nothing.” Run a race that has lasting value and focus all your energy and strain heavenward on a goal that lies ahead...a goal with a heavenly finish and a prize that is imperishable.

While the work of Christ for us may be a perfected work, the work of the Holy Spirit in us is still growing and developing. Paul wants to “catch hold of” and “pull down” all that God has for him and he encourages us to do the same. “Join with others and follow the pattern we give you.”

*“Life is rightly guided when the pilot knows the goal toward which he must make his way.”
Third-century BC letter by Aristeas*

Wednesday, August 3 | Philippians 3:17-21 | Alvin Pelton

“Our Citizenship in Heaven”

In the third chapter of the letter to the Philippian church Paul continues to speak plainly to the fellowship to which he is warmly drawn. He is not scolding or correcting; he is not setting deep theological guidelines or detailing church polity. Paul is talking to his friends about matters that matter deeply to him. The letter is written from his imprisonment in a Roman jail where confinement means either being chained to a wall with soldiers next to him to or chained with him as well. There are no private times or conversations.

Paul uses language to remind the church that he had been transformed in this life to some state of perfection in faith and grace. He declares that he has not yet become a citizen of heaven. Rather, he must continue to struggle with this humanity with a humble mind and determination. Perfection has
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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK EIGHT: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-4:23 AUGUST 1-7

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not been made complete, even for the apostle, and the work of grace has not been carried through to the end.

In the struggles of everyday life most people do not need additional expectations placed on them. We often set goals, just like New Year's resolutions, but they are seldom kept over the long-term. It is simply too demanding for a person to alter their patterns long enough to develop new patterns. How can people in the era of the New Testament have words for me today about goal setting and developing new patterns for my life? Strong faith and disciplined living in our present life prepares us for an eternity filled with the presence of Christ. Begin today with a commitment to set aside time for study and time for praying about the lesson to come on Sunday. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts and preparation.

Thursday, August 4 | Philippians 4:1-9 | Alvin Pelton

For Paul, a prisoner in chains, it was gift to welcome a friend like Epaphroditus and he would never forget how much all of the believers of Philippi meant to him. As he begins to wrap up his thoughts, he speaks from his heart: I love you, long for you, you are my joy, you are my crown (the prize I receive for running the race), so stand firm in the Lord and don't veer off the course.

Along with Paul's expressions of love, he also voices a concern about a conflict growing within this church. It seems Epaphroditus has shared news about two of the ladies, who have worked alongside Paul in the church; apparently their differences are taking a toll on the fellowship. Paul takes the time to plead for reconciliation, for the good of the whole, and he even asks another individual to step in and offer help. He writes, "Remember their names are written in the book of life along with others who labored beside me."

Now he writes...

Celebrate God and revel in Him! Make it clear to others that you are on their side, working with them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could come at any moment.

Don't fret or worry. Instead – pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, everything will come together for good. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

Fill your minds on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, gracious – the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you've learned from me. (Excerpts from *The Message*)

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK EIGHT: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-4:23

AUGUST 1-7

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We find "the book of life" mentioned in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Paul refers to it in Philippians 4:3 but he also speaks about "our citizenship in heaven" back in Philippians 3:20.

Extra-biblical information states that Greek cities of the ancient world maintained a list of citizens in a public register. When someone committed a criminal act and was condemned, he lost his citizenship and his name was then erased from the register.

Being a Christian could result in your name being removed. Perhaps when Paul is speaking of "our citizenship in heaven" and the faithful followers of Christ having their names written in God's book of life, this speaks to some of the fears of the Philippians.

Friday, August 5 | Philippians 4:10-23 | Alvin Pelton

Following his own advice Paul is rejoicing in the Lord, as he continues to close out his letter of thanksgiving to the church at Philippi. Several times (Philippians 4:15-18) he uses financial terms so this may well imply that the gift primarily consisted of money but I think we could also assume that other items of necessity would have been included to ease the hardship of his imprisonment.

Moving toward a conclusion we find an interesting play on words. Our protagonist was a master communicator and in some Scriptures we hear him reshape the thoughts of the Greco-Roman philosophers to share the message of Christ. Aristotle defined contentment as "possessing all things and needing nothing." The Stoic ideal was to be "self-sufficient in all things." Paul takes some of those messages and applies them to his complete dependence on God. In Philippians 4:11-12 we read "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what is to be in need, and I know what is to have plenty." In Philippians 4:13, Paul reminds us that "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." Paul was content and it was not based upon need or self-sufficiency, but because he was utterly dependent on a God who gave him all that was needed. Counter to the Stoic's ideal, Paul told us that God's grace was sufficient for us and that His power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Not wanting his dear friends in Philippi to think he was ungrateful when he said he needed nothing, he again expresses thanks to them "...it was so good of you to share in my troubles" and then he says, "Not that I desire a gift. I desire that fruit might abound to your account."

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK EIGHT: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-4:23 AUGUST 1-7

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With the closing strokes of the pen he closes his letter with a benediction and gives God all praise and glory. Do not neglect to notice who is included in the closing greetings...those who belong to Caesar's household.

When we read Paul's testimony and follow his many journeys, it seems almost laughable to think that some individuals accused him of being nothing more than a "seed picker" because he was not a trained speaker. (See Acts 17:18 and 2 Corinthians 11:5-6)

Saturday, August 6-Sunday, August 7 | Philippians 3:1-4:23

Reread Philippians 3:1-4:23 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK NINE: COLOSSIANS 1:1-2:23

AUGUST 8-14

Monday, August 8 | Colossians 1:1-14 | Amy Jackson

Paul's letter to the church at Colossae was likely written around AD 62, which is around the same time that Paul wrote Ephesians and Philemon. The church at Colossae was likely started by Ephaphras (also called Epaphroditus), who probably heard Paul preach the gospel during his ministry in Ephesus and then returned home to share the gospel with those in Colossae. Paul wrote to the Colossians while he was in prison (Colossians 4:13), encouraging them to remain faithful to Christ in the midst of false teaching (which was probably some kind of mix of local pagan and Jewish beliefs).

Paul begins his letter by offering a thanksgiving and prayer for the church; he praises God for the testimony of their faith in Jesus and prays that they would be filled "with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9).

Isn't this a prayer that resonates with us all? I think we've all prayed for God's will to be revealed to us! Where should we go to college? Who should we marry? What might our next career step be? While we know that God cares deeply about all of these things and is sovereign over all of life's choices, we are reminded in Colossians that, above all of these things, the Lord cares about the manner of our hearts. His will is that, as we gain spiritual understanding, we would "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10).

How do we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord? First, we recognize that we cannot do this on our own. The good news is that, through the cross, we have been justified and made right with God – we are delivered from darkness and forgiven of our sins (see Colossians 1:13-14). In light of this truth, Paul's prayer is that we might respond with lives of worship and gratitude, growing in sanctification as we "give thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light" (Colossians 1:12).

Today, as you think over decisions to be made for the future and seek God's will in different areas of your life, remember that God's plan for your life is first and foremost that you would know Jesus and be made like Him through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that you might make Him known through your witness.

Tuesday, August 9 | Colossians 1:15-23 | Amy Jackson

Have you ever participated in a "get to know you" game where you had to pick a few words or titles to describe yourself? In those situations, I always go back and forth on which descriptors to use. How (continued on next page)



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK NINE: COLOSSIANS 1:1-2:23

AUGUST 8-14

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do I accurately convey my identity with a few nouns or adjectives?

In today's passage, Paul gives us two titles to help us understand the identity of Jesus. First, in Colossians 1:15-17, Paul describes Jesus as Creator. It's a hard concept for us to understand, but as Christians we proclaim faith in a God who reveals Himself through the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that Jesus has always existed in relationship with the Father and Holy Spirit. Long before entering the world as a baby in Bethlehem, Jesus was present with the Father as He spoke creation into being, as the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters (Genesis 1:1). Everything was created through and by Jesus – from the angels and galaxies to the cells in our bodies! And Jesus continues to sustain creation: "He is before all things and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17).

Second, read Colossians 1:18-20, where Paul describes Jesus as Reconciler. This Creator, in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:19), took on flesh so that we might know God. He came to reconcile humanity to the Father "making peace by the blood of the cross" (Colossians 1:20). Jesus, fully God and fully man, turns God's enemies into His friends through His work on the cross.

Finally, read Colossians 1:21-23. Maybe you've been agonizing over what titles you might choose to describe yourself – but take heart! Here, Paul reminds us that "reconciled" is the most important word we can ever use to describe ourselves. We were once God's enemies – alienated, evil, and hostile to the things of God. But if you have trusted in Christ for salvation, you have been made right with God. The fact that you have been reconciled to God through Christ is the most important thing about you: it defines you more than your marital status, income, occupation, race, or personality quirks. Spend some time today reflecting on the reminder that you are reconciled to God – presented "holy and blameless and above reproach before Him" (Colossians 1:22) because Jesus is Creator and Reconciler, and that, since He holds all things together, you also continue to be sustained by Him.

Wednesday, August 10 | Colossians 1:24-29 | Amy Jackson

If we're honest with ourselves, there are parts of the Bible that are hard to read - that make us squirm in our seats. This is one of those passages for me! What does it mean that Paul, in his suffering, "is filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24)? And, why is it that Paul declares, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake" (Colossians 1:24)? What kind of person would rejoice in suffering?

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK NINE: COLOSSIANS 1:1-2:23

AUGUST 8-14

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I think our first question here helps inform how we answer the second. Paul isn't saying that Jesus' suffering on the cross is incomplete in some way - he's not adding to Christ's anguish or completing it in the sense that His atonement is somehow lacking. Christ's work on the cross is perfect and complete. What I think Paul is talking about here is how, through his suffering, the gospel continues to be proclaimed. Though Paul is in chains, the word of God is made known. While we might think that suffering in this kind of manner is only for ministers or missionaries, the truth is that we will all face suffering on this path to becoming like Jesus.

Now, I don't think Paul was jumping up and down in joy and anticipation because of his call to suffer. Paul was imprisoned - and we know that he was mocked, beaten, and suffered greatly for his faith. Paul rejoices, though, because the gospel continued to go forth despite his afflictions - in fact, the gospel was proclaimed through his suffering. That brings me to ask myself the hard question, "How am I proclaiming the gospel through my own suffering?" My prayer is that I would not waste opportunities to make the good news known, even in the midst of trials and weakness.

Second, Paul reminds us here of the "riches of the glory of this mystery" (Colossians 1:27). What is this mystery? It is the mystery of the gospel - "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). As followers of Christ, we know that our suffering is temporary on this road to becoming like Jesus. What's more, we also know that our suffering can't separate us from Jesus (Romans 8:28) and our suffering can't compare to the glory waiting for us as God's children (2 Corinthians 4:17). And this, my friends, is good news - that the suffering we face here is temporary and that we can cling to Christ and the hope of glory we have in Him!

Thursday, August 11 | Colossians 2:1-15 | Amy Jackson

Imagine eating your favorite meal at your favorite restaurant. For me, it's probably a tie between the chicken salad plate with a side of fruit at Smith's Drugstore in downtown Forest City, North Carolina or anything from Pizza House in Chesnee, South Carolina with their classic white sauce as my condiment of choice. After eating either of these meals, I am so incredibly full - I don't need anything else to satisfy my appetite.

Here in Colossians 2, Paul combats false teachings leading the Colossians astray by reminding them that, in Christ, they are complete. Take a look at Colossians 2:9, where Paul explains that, just as the fullness of God dwells in Christ, believers "have been filled with Him, who is the head of all rule and authority." As believers in Christ, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and our salvation is complete - we (continued on next page)



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK NINE: COLOSSIANS 1:1-2:23 AUGUST 8-14

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have everything we need in Christ.

The problem with these false teachings is that they claimed the Colossians needed salvation plus “something else” to be more like Christ and to experience the fullness of God. Paul uses three illustrations to remind the church that, if we are in Christ, we are complete. Take a look at Colossians 2:11-15. First, he says that, if we are in Christ, we are spiritually circumcised - forever marked as God’s children. Second, we have been buried with Christ in our baptism - we have died to sin and to our old ways, and have been raised to walk in newness of life through the power of the cross! Third, God has cancelled our records of debt - they have been nailed to the cross and are forever erased!

Take a moment today to meditate on the truths and on the good news of the cross - that through God’s work in Christ, we have all we need for salvation and are “full” - the payment for our sin has been fully satisfied and there is nothing else that we can do to add to His work!

Friday, August 12 | Colossians 2:16-23 | Amy Jackson

At the end of Colossians 2, Paul gives us a little more information about this mysterious false teaching which has taken the Colossians captive. It seems, from these verses, that part of the pagan-Jewish mysticism focused on rules about eating and observing holy days and also encouraged asceticism (self-denial) and angel worship.

With the exception of angel worship (because we believe even angels are creatures of God and the first commandment reminds us that God alone is worthy of our worship!), these other rules and observances aren’t anything bad in and of themselves - the issue is when we fall into legalism as a result of these rules and observances.

I can be honest with you and tell you that, almost all of my life, I have had to fight against legalism in my heart - against the belief that, in the words of preacher Kent Hughes, “I can get to God on my own terms, by my own might.” I grew up as an overachiever, especially when it came to academics. As a follower of Christ, I have to fight against the tendency toward legalism - toward making my relationship with Jesus more about checking off boxes and following rules and less about walking in faithful obedience because of my gratitude for what Jesus has done for me. I have a feeling that many of us struggle in this way because our flesh has no trouble setting up religious rules to make us feel like we can bring something to the table. The problem (and - the good news!) is that the truth of the gospel is complete in what Christ has done for us. Nothing can be added to it through our own works
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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK NINE: COLOSSIANS 1:1-2:23 AUGUST 8-14

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or observances - Christ's work on the cross is fully finished and complete.

My prayer for us today is that we would remember that "with Christ we died to the elemental spirits of the world" (Colossians 2:20). We don't have to fall back into legalistic ways, thinking we can earn our salvation or our good standing before the Father! Rather, we get to live out the truth of the gospel that, despite our own insufficiency, God drew near to us in Christ and gives us salvation we don't deserve and we can't earn! This news frees our hearts to draw near to God in faith, walking in obedience with Him out of gratitude for what He has done for us instead of trying to earn being in His good graces.

Saturday, August 13-Sunday, August 14 | Colossians 1:1-2:23

Reread Colossians 1:1-2:23 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK TEN: COLOSSIANS 3:1-4:18
AUGUST 15-21

Monday, August 15 | Colossians 3:1-11 | Amy Jackson

One of the things I appreciate about Paul is that his letters are so logical and organized. Often, Paul begins his letters with right teaching about the Christian faith. Then, he moves to explain right living - because, when we really understand the truth of the gospel, this understanding helps us to know how to live in light of these truths.

Paul has spent the first two chapters of his letter rebuking false teaching and reminding the church that their hope is in Christ and His work on the cross - that the hope of salvation is not a "Jesus plus something else" formula but is only in what God has done for His children in Christ. In Colossians 3:1-11, Paul gives us several verbs to help us to know how to live in light of this truth. First, our immediate response ought to be worship! We have been raised with Christ, our lives are hidden with Christ in God, and one day we will appear with Him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4) - these truths should stir up worship in our hearts!

Second, Paul calls us to seek and set our minds on the things that are above (Colossians 3:1-2). Now, Paul isn't talking about gazing at clouds everyday (although I think spending time in nature helps us worship our Creator, so cloud gazing is good!). Rather, Paul is talking about us seeking Christ, setting our minds on Him. To seek after or to set your mind on something is active, requiring deliberate concentration. In a world full of distractions, believers are called to focus on what is above - and ultimately - Who is above. Christ is reigning and that changes how we live. Two practical ways we seek and set our minds on Christ are through studying Scripture and prayer, asking that God would align our hearts with His and make us more like Jesus.

Third, Paul calls us to "put to death what is earthly in you" (Colossians 3:5). I like that Paul again uses such a strong image to convey the importance of battling sin! We aren't called to sit by idly and wait for sanctification to happen, but to comply with the Holy Spirit and to be actively seek how we might put sin to death in our own lives. John Owen, a Puritan pastor, told believers to "be killing sin or it will be killing you." As Christians, sin is no longer our master, yet sin wounds the heart of God and we must guard against evil grabbing a foothold in our lives. We trust that in Jesus, we are justified before the Father and through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are sanctified to become more like Jesus. Part of the work of sanctification is putting sin to death.

Pray about where you should focus on killing sin in your own life. As that God would help you as you seek after Him and set your mind on Him - because setting our affections on God and killing sin are connected. As hymn writer Helen Lemmel put it, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face - and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK TEN: COLOSSIANS 3:1-4:18
AUGUST 15-21

Tuesday, August 16 | Colossians 3:12-17 | Amy Jackson

I think almost all girls loved to play dress-up at some point when they were young. The best part about playing dress-up is that you could wear anything - there were no rules! Matching was thrown out the window - and really, the more clothing, the better! I have a picture in my head of a little girl wearing a princess dress, a tutu, a hat, a beaded necklace, play high-heel shoes, and carrying a cute clutch.

Paul's description of what we ought to "put on" in Colossians 3:12-17 reminds me a bit of dress-up. Just as we are killing sin and putting off former vices (see Colossians 3:5-10), we are also called to "put on" some additional items of clothing because we are "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved" (Colossians 3:12). The list is pretty expansive, and I can honestly say that there are moments I struggle with "putting on" just one of these items, let alone all of them! It's important to remember that we can't do this on our own strength. Look at Colossians 3:14. Paul tells us that, above all, we should put on love. In ancient times, people wore a number of flowy garments (you can attest to this if you've ever been a shepherd or wise man in the Living Nativity!). These garments could only all stay on if a belt was included in the ensemble! Paul is basically saying that, if we don't have love, all of these other things don't really matter - and ultimately, all of these others "articles of clothing" come from love! It reminds me a bit of 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that, even if they can speak in tongues and give everything to the poor, if they do not have love, they have nothing.

I've been reading J.I. Packer's *Knowing God* over these last few months. In his chapter on love, Packer argues that, often when Paul talks about our love for God, he's talking less about our own love and more about our knowledge of God's love and how that moves and motivates us to love. In other words, when I really "get" how much God loves me - despite my sin and brokenness - and really understand what He has done for me in Christ, that moves my heart to worship and love. This is the kind of love that Paul is talking about. Everything is changed because of the cross - including how and why we forgive one another (see Colossians 3:13).

Today, reflect on God's love for you in Christ - that you are at peace with God because of the cross (Romans 5, Colossians 3:15). Spend time in Scripture and sing a worship song or hymn to remind you of this love (Colossians 3:16). Pray that the knowledge of how God loves you would impact how you love others - that "in whatever you do, in word or deed, you would do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK TEN: COLOSSIANS 3:1-4:18
AUGUST 15-21

Wednesday, August 17 | Colossians 3:18-4:1 | Amy Jackson

In these verses, we are reminded that the gospel changes everything - including how we treat one another. Paul's words here might not seem radical to us, but they are revolutionary considering their first-century context! First, Paul speaks to family relationships. Notice first that Paul is talking to husbands and wives - he isn't addressing how men and women ought to interact in the church or work. And, he addresses them equally here, which is a drastic change from their place in the first-century society! Jewish wives were considered property and could be treated like possessions. But Paul encourages wives to submit freely to their husbands - and for husbands to love their wives and not to be harsh with them (Colossians 3:18-19).

Second, Paul speaks to parents and children. He encourages children to obey their parents, mirroring the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12). He also warns fathers not to provoke their children (Colossians 3:21). Under Roman law, fathers could do whatever they wanted with their kids - they could sell them into slavery, abuse them, or even kill them! But we are reminded here that everything changes because of Christ. We are also reminded that both excessive discipline and lack of discipline are dangerous; children need rules and guideposts, but they also need parents who love them and want what is best for them - who intentionally invest their time in loving their children as God has loved them. Without rules, we are left on our own. Some restriction is good - loving parents don't allow their children to run into the street in the face of traffic, after all!

Third, Paul speaks to the relationship between slaves and masters. Slavery was common in this era; Paul doesn't condone slavery but does remind us that our faith changes how we live - including our working relationships. He encourages slaves to work as if they are working for God - and for masters to treat their slaves fairly (Colossians 3:22-23, 4:1). This command can be translated into our world, where most of us are employers or employees. We answer to God in how we work and how we treat one another. Employees - are you working with a full heart, eager to please the Father rather than just trying to gain eye-service through people-pleasing and doing only the minimum job necessary? Employers - do you treat your employees fairly and with kindness, remembering that you also have a Master in heaven?

Spend some time reflecting on how you are proclaiming the gospel through your relationships - both in your home and in your workplace. We have the opportunity to proclaim God's love through our interactions with one another - especially in our homes and our workplaces. How might God be challenging you in these ways?



Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK TEN: COLOSSIANS 3:1-4:18
AUGUST 15-21

Thursday, August 18 | Colossians 4:2-6 | Amy Jackson

Have you ever studied a cookbook recipe? Although I'm a novice, I love to cook. I always notice how each line of instructions begins with a verb. We see the same things here in Paul as he wraps up his letter! First, Paul commands the Colossians to "continue steadfastly in prayer" (Colossians 4:2). I like how he helps give us some guidance in what that means - kind of like a recipe! It's one thing to tell people to pray, but sometimes we don't know how to enter into prayer, or what we should even be praying for! First, Paul tells us we ought to "continue steadfastly" in prayer - to "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). I think moments of concentrated daily prayer are vital - but Paul here is also reminding us that we should have prayer attitudes and be in constant communication with the Father. And, our prayerful attitudes should be "peppered" with thanksgiving!

Second, Paul also encourages believers to pray for him - for open doors for the gospel! One of the things that amazes me about Paul is that he prayed that the gospel would go forth - even if that meant danger! Paul recognizes that, while he is chained, the gospel remains unchained - in fact, because of persecution, the gospel goes into previously unreached places! Paul asks that the church continue to pray for him as he declares God's word. I wonder if we pray this for each other? Do I pray for my friends and family to have opportunities to share the gospel? I pray for their safety and well-being - but perhaps we might challenge ourselves by praying for open doors for one another to share our faith.

Third, Paul reminds us of our role as believers in an unbelieving world, as he calls us to "walk in wisdom toward outsiders" (Colossians 4:5). Paul doesn't encourage Christians to stay in a secluded group but pictures a world where believers interact with unbelievers and have opportunities for faithful witness through their work and community involvement. This is a challenge for me, because I spend a lot of time with Christians. Where am I investing with unbelievers? How am I walking in wisdom toward outsiders? Perhaps for you this is through your job - but perhaps it is also through building relationships with your neighbors or being involved in civic groups. Spend some time in prayer today asking that God would give you opportunities to share His love with those around you who do not believe - that He would help you to "walk in wisdom"!

Friday, August 19 | Colossians 4:7-18 | Amy Jackson

Sometimes, when I'm reading an epistle, I have the temptation to treat the closing verses the same way I treat the credits at a movie theater. By the time the credits start to roll, I've tuned out and am already gathering my things to exit the theater. While we might be tempted to check out and look over this list of names, there's a lot we can learn from these final verses.

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Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians

WEEK TEN: COLOSSIANS 3:1-4:18 AUGUST 15-21

(continued from previous page)

Here's the thing about the credits in a movie: while we might be familiar with the main stars, the people listed in the credits have a large responsibility to make the film happen - from designing sets to helping with makeup to editing film!

Paul here reminds us of the importance of the household of faith. He has written this letter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He says that Tychicus and Onesimus will fill them in on everything that has happened for Paul while he has been in prison. They are also greeted by a host of others, including John Mark, Ephaphras, and Luke. If you read on through Colossians 3:17, you'll notice that the list of those in the credits has expanded to include Jews, Gentiles, a former slave, and even a woman!

Rather than skip over the people and places, pick up a study Bible to read the notes on why these people were important and integral to God's mission in the early church. And, realize that, just like these people, you have a place and purpose in God's kingdom work! You are a part of the credits, called to be a faithful servant. Perhaps it's not in the same way as the preacher Paul, who was gifted in preaching and writing - but there are many callings to serve faithfully in God's kingdom. After all, Nympha was the host of a house church and Luke was a physician - and both used their gifts to serve the kingdom.

So, where do you fit in the credits of God's kingdom work? As you continue to seek out how God might use you, remember Paul's benediction - that "grace be with you" (Colossians 4:18). Paul ends his letter in the same way that he began it - reminding us of the unmerited favor we have received from God through Christ, which is the only true motivation for our faithful service and witness.

Saturday, August 20-Sunday, August 21 | Colossians 3:1-4:18

Reread Colossians 3:1-4:18 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.