



LC STUDY GUIDE

“Thrive” Series

The Passage: Colossians 1:15-22

September 19 – October 2

Intro: Welcome to our new ministry year that we’ve entitled, “Rooted, Growing, and Bearing Fruit.” Our first series, Thrive, we’ll focus on the book of Colossians. The people of Colossae are a group of churches that contain different backgrounds of Judaism and paganism. There is a “philosophy” spreading that is undermining the message of the gospel of Jesus. Paul, who has never met the Colossians, is writing to address this philosophy (that is never really spelled out for us) and to insure they understand who Jesus is, his message of salvation, and how a Christ-follower ought to approach life after repentance.

Our Central Idea tonight is to see the necessity of understanding the divine status of Jesus and that it’s through Jesus that we be reconciled to God.

Colossians 1:15-22

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.

16 For in him all things were created:
things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers
or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

17 He is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church;

(18b) He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,
so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things,
whether things on earth or things in heaven,
by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. **22** But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— **23** if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

- O** – How does Paul describe God and Jesus in this poetically written set of verses (15-20)?
- Examine the structure of the poem. Notice the repetition of 15 and 18b. What other repetitions and patterns do you see?
 - What do you think he is trying to establish to this young congregation of Christian faith?
 - What resonates most with you?

I – As we unpack these verses, we note the metaphor Paul uses – “the head of the body” – to describe Jesus and his followers. What does this metaphor imply? *(The head provides the mind, the vision, and the voice/authority for the body. It leads or commands the able and willing body. Also interesting is Paul’s use of the “head,” the “beginning,” and “firstborn,” which all derive of the same root in Hebrew, “rsyt.” He appears to use the term “head” as a source of origin and a position of ultimate sovereignty for Christ-followers. Thus, the metaphor casts Jesus as head of the body of the church and as the source of the church’s life.)*

A – Theologian N.T. Wright writes, “What the Colossians need to know above all, if they are to grow as Christians, increasing in wisdom, power, patience and thanksgiving, is *the centrality and supremacy of Jesus Christ.*”¹ And it’s true today. What happens if we do not understand the centrality and supremacy of Jesus?

- O** – What strikes you as compelling in verses 21-23? What contrasts, “conditions,” and consequences (positive and negative) do you see Paul describing?

I – After the poem, Paul gives a concise version of the gospel. He states our alienated relationship to God, then describes the power and the beauty that come with repentance. If you read verses 15-20 again, what part of the poem does verse 22 point back to? Why do you think Paul sets up these verses this way? *(Paul is trying to help these early Christians understand their place in God’s world. He is condensing massive theology and trying to make it personal and understandable. The poem is the big picture; verses 21-23 are how all believers are included and invited into that picture.)*

A – As we grow in our understanding of the gospel and as we grow in our hearts’ commitment to Jesus, how might we imagine our everyday lives to be more distinct and more authentic?

¹ Wright, T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (p. 150). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
- b. Complement these questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?)
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
- e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching” rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.