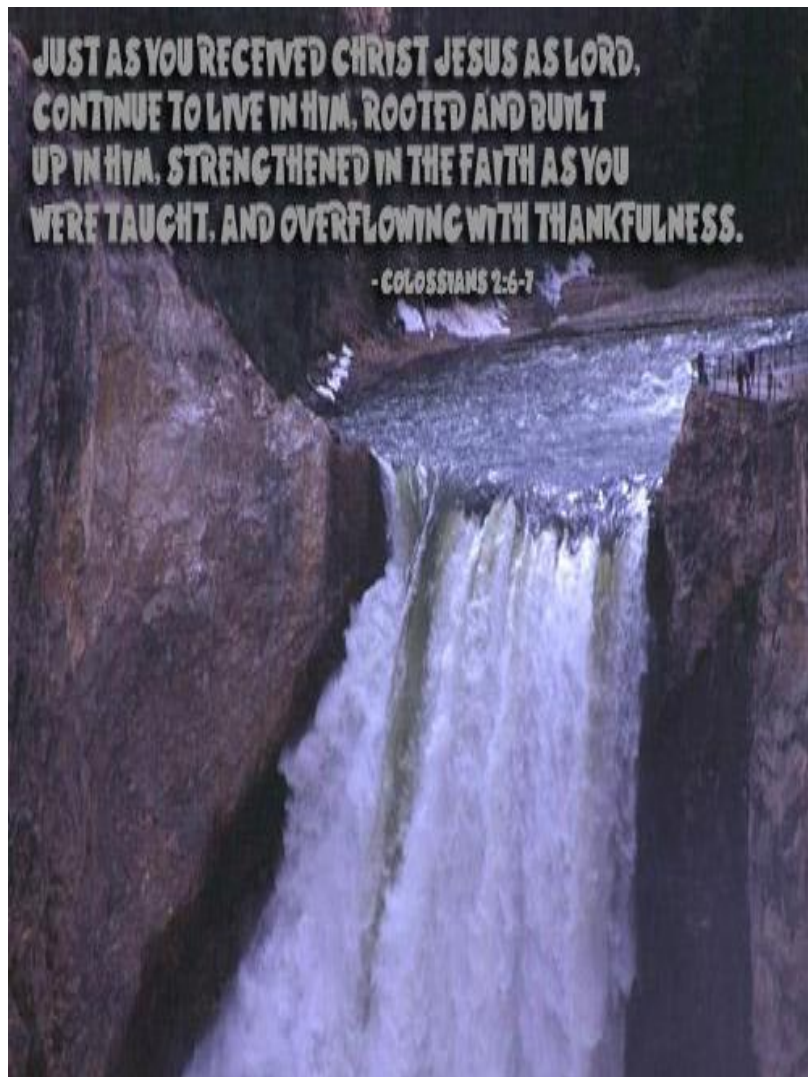


Colossians



By Lynton Brocklehurst

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The Navigators of NZ is a non-profit (and non-denominational) organisation that aims to help people find Good News for their life through the story and life of Jesus. We try to help people connect their life and faith in practical ways, and in the process help them to live well and make a difference in their worlds.

The Navigators of NZ is also part of an international organisation - The Navigators – which is involved in over 100 countries around the world. If you'd like any more info on this, just make contact with us: info@navigators.org.nz.



1. Our Approach to Colossians

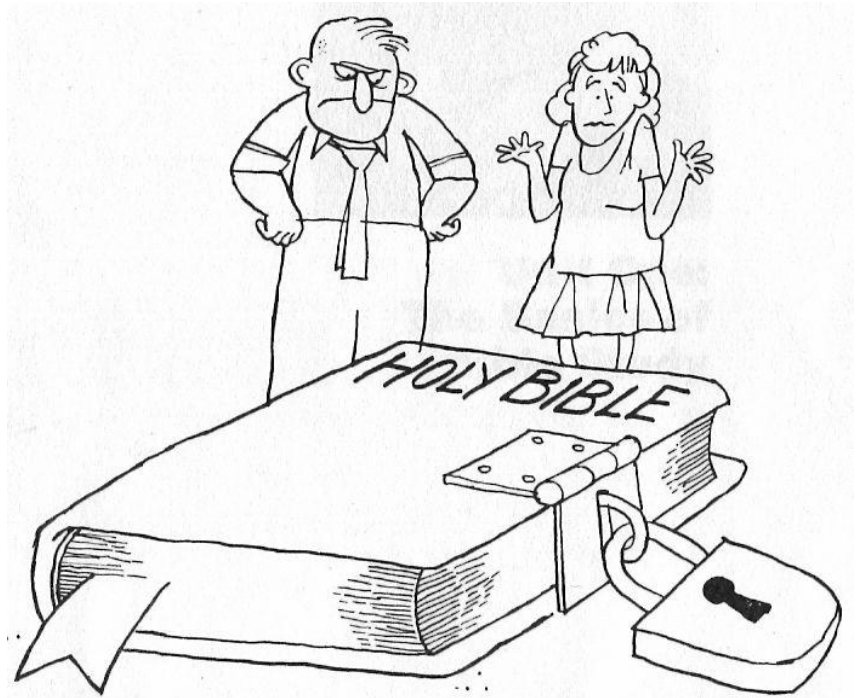
Getting into the story

Many people can't get into the bible because they have the wrong approach. They think the bible is full of "do's and don'ts". But the bible is not an *instruction manual*. It is a *story book* - full of amazing accounts of people discovering just how real God was in everyday life. The letter to the Colossians is a window into one of the small stories that go to make up God's big story of the human race. It is a real letter, written by an amazing man who was a prisoner at the time. Amazingly he had never met the people he was writing to, but a friend of his who had started the church told him about the good things that were happening and also about some of the pressures they were under. He decided to help them out by giving a few pointers about staying on track in their new faith. It gives a fascinating picture of the early days of Christianity as the gospel began to spread throughout the Roman Empire.

The reason God gave us the bible in story form is that he wants it to be gutsy and real. He wants us to be inspired. He wants us to be involved in the big story of the human race, which just now happens to be our story. The Colossians had their day 2000 years ago. Right now, it's our turn. The letter to the Colossians shows us how to go about following God; it stirs our hearts. As we immerse ourselves in the Colossians' story, and in Paul's story, the Holy Spirit excites us about following Jesus in our town or city in 2010!

The fact that the bible is essentially *story* requires a different approach. We can't afford to be superficial. We have to move beyond seizing upon a few random words and phrases here and there, lazily making them mean what we want them to mean. If we really want God to inspire us, we need to think deeply about what it was really like for those people back then. We need to honour God's intentions in giving us a letter about real people in real situations. It is all about taking their example seriously. It is life impacting life. Paul is very clear about this matter of being an example and learning from the example of others. In another letter he wrote - "You know *how we lived* among you for your sake. You became *imitators* of us and of the Lord ... and so you became a *model* to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia." (1 Thess 1:6-7).

So, our approach is to read the letter as if we have never seen it before, immerse ourselves in the story it tells us, and see what the Holy Spirit reveals. This will be very exciting, because, not only has the Holy Spirit inspired the letter to the Colossians (2 Tim 3:16-17), He is here with us now to help us understand and apply it. (1 Cor 2:12).



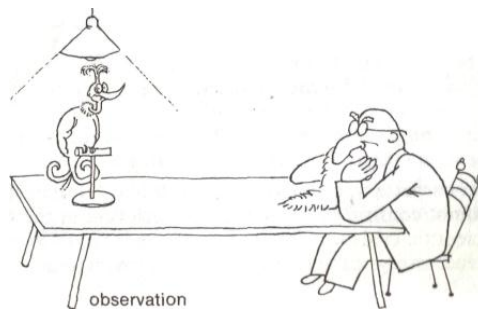
Convictions - not Opinions.

An opinion is something you hold. A conviction is something that holds you. The only way to get solid convictions is by doing your own thinking. So, our method is built around doing our own thinking. This study is not prescribed, with predetermined outcomes; this is open, original study. You get to figure things out yourself, together with your group and the help of the Holy Spirit. Very exciting!

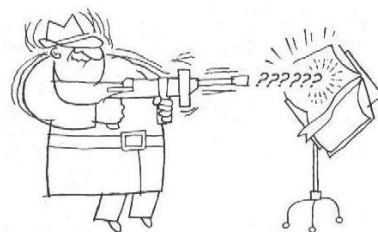
To do this, there are three things we need to become good at:

Observing, Interpreting and Responding

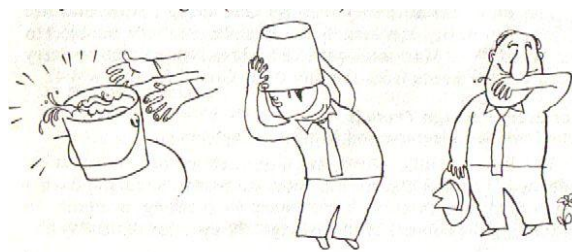
1. **Observing** – reading a passage for the first time, it is easy to focus in on what we don't understand, what puzzles us, or what interests us. But this causes us to narrow in on a few things; it limits our ability to take in *all* that is being said. Observation asks the question, ***What is being said?*** It is the art of noticing and appreciating as much as possible in the passage, even the obvious things. It is amazing how much more we will see in a passage if we just take a little time.



2. **Interpreting** – once we have a good grasp of what is actually there, we can focus on what it means. Interpretation asks the question, ***What does this mean?*** Or, more particularly ***What did this mean when it was written 2000 years ago?*** One danger is that we move too quickly to ***What does this mean to me?*** (That comes later, in the “Responding” step). Here, in particular, we are trying to come to grips with things we don't understand. Interpretation involves *stating our questions*, gathering *information* and drawing *conclusions*.



3. **Responding** - here the questions are, ***what does this mean to me? What does this mean to us?*** Here, we track the things that the Holy Spirit is stirring in us. This is the really exciting part because God is in the process of transforming us, making us more and more like Jesus in how we think, feel and act (2 Corinthians 3:18). In this step, we need to identify where ***we are*** at present and where we believe God ***wants us to be***.



For each study we will introduce some practical hints on how to go about this approach. You will find a full list of these ideas at the back of the booklet under Study Methods (page 36)

Good tangents!

Tangents are powerful. There is nothing like a good tangent to spark up a discussion. And, nothing quite as discouraging as a tangent that gets us completely sidetracked. Have you ever wondered why some tangents are incredibly helpful, while others are incredibly frustrating? In our groups, I suggest a tangent is good when it *connects* what we are experiencing, observing or thinking *with the passage we are discussing*. It is good when the passage stimulates the tangent, when the amazing things we have been reading get us thinking about things important to us personally. Tangents like this have a crucial role in keeping things real. They prevent the discussion from becoming dry and theoretical.

We can also have bad tangents. When someone introduces an idea that is not very well connected to the passage, bad tangents occur. The idea seems snatched “out of the air”. It is even worse if it is not that important, or is speculative, or has minimal relevance to the majority of the group.

Tangents have a crucial role in making powerful connections between the biblical story and our own stories. Ideally, our small group discussions should begin with us talking about Paul and the Colossians and what their lives were like, and end up with us talking about you and me and what our lives are like – and praying for one another.

Getting stuck

There will be times when we just can't seem to work out what the passage is saying. We read words and phrases we don't understand. We encounter an unfamiliar context and culture. Maybe someone comes up with a dodgy explanation and we begin to wonder how certain we can be. It is in moments like these that we could use a little bit of help, and fortunately, there is a lot of really good help available. In fact, there are some incredibly good **free bible resources** for bible study*.

Online Sources:

www.biblegateway.com

Brilliant for **word searches**, and for comparing **different translations**. Excellent IVP New Testament **Commentary**

www.nextbible.org

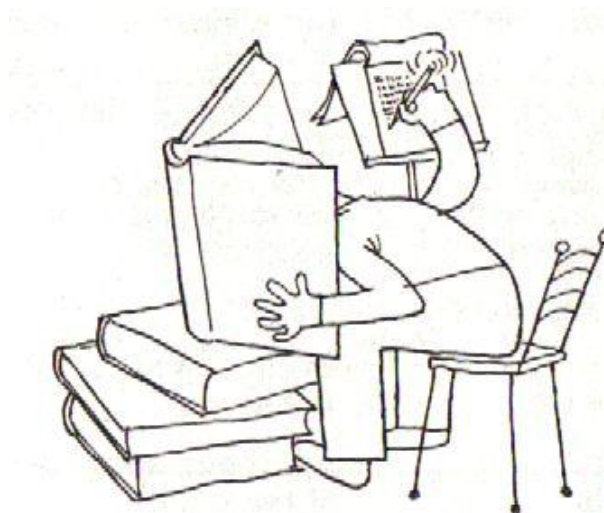
Excellent for **cross-references**, **word searches** and **word meanings**. Also a portal to a huge number of resources – translators notes, multiple translations, background info, articles, commentaries, maps (even Google satellite!), You name it, it is there.

www.en.wikipedia.org for basic info and links

E-Sword

This has to be the friendliest, most well resourced free bible software program around.

E-Sword has all the basic essentials: Multiple translations, Dictionaries, Commentaries, Cross-references, search facilities. Well worth downloading from www.e-sword.com



Hard Copy

Bible Notes – intros, footnotes. (NIV study bible notes are excellent).

Cross-reference columns

Concordances at back of many bibles

* These are best to use to in conjunction with your own study and not instead of it.

We suggest you do most of your own work first, writing in the space either side of the passage. You can then supplement it with information and insights from the resources above.

2. Colossians Intro

An “Occasional” Letter

Colossians is a small letter, written by Paul, to the church in Colossae. Even though the book is only four chapters long, the book has a lot to say about the gospel, Jesus Christ, freedom from legalism and Christian living.

What was happening at Colossae is one of the many ‘mini-episodes’ in God’s unfolding story of the human race. God has designed the bible to be full of life and movement. We meet real people in real situations. By reading the bible we can see what it looks like when real individuals, groups and peoples relate to the living God. New Testament letters like Colossians are sometimes called “*occasional letters*”, meaning that they are written in response to a unique set of circumstances. While many of them share a broader historical context, each letter has a particular local, relational and circumstantial context. By giving us much of the New Testament in ‘*occasional-letter*’ form, it is as if God is inviting us to find him in our own circumstances by entering into the lives and circumstances of the first believers in Jesus. And what better way to do this than by reading some personal correspondence between the people involved.



The aim is not to copy what they did. There is no direct match between us and our circumstances and the Colossians and their circumstances. Rather, we must let their story “inform” our story. To do this safely and well we need to gain a good basic understanding of the background to this amazing letter.

In many ways our task in this overview study is not unlike the first task of an historical novelist or film director. The novel or film will only have real impact if the characters are well researched and the story line is understandable.

At the end of this study we invite you to come up with some sort of simple presentation that can act as a starting point or hook for explaining what Colossians is about. It could be a monologue, dialogue, poem, prose, picture, drama, sculpture, etc. Alternatively, for the more analytical among us, the creation could be a chart, illustration, timeline, outline, etc. If you are doing an artistic piece, there is room for a bit of poetic licence. Feel free to use your imagination to capture the “occasion” of Colossians. (More of this at the end of the study)



Getting into the “Occasion”

In this study our aim is to get a sweeping overview of the letter. We want to discover the writer and his purpose, the readers and their situation, the broad themes and the main issues addressed.

There are two basic ways to piece the story together:

1. By examining **the bible itself** (in conjunction with translators foot-notes and brief explanatory background notes)
2. By consulting **extra biblical sources** – in particular bible commentaries, dictionaries and encyclopaedias and Internet resources.

It is a very helpful discipline to do your own work with the “primary sources” (the biblical texts) first. The work of biblical academics is very helpful, even essential, but each academic will have his own biases and point of view.

The letter itself

First Impressions

Picture yourself as a new believer in Colossae. You are meeting with fellow believers in a home to worship God and encourage one another. (In those days there were no church buildings. Believers met in the home of the family with the biggest living area). Someone excitedly introduces a visitor with a letter from the Apostle Paul. He is then asked to read the letter. Everyone listens intently.

With this in mind read the whole letter quickly two or three times, maybe on different occasions. Write down your initial impressions and observations

Write down the names of everyone mentioned in the letter. How were they described? What titles were they given? Focus especially on the writer Paul and the recipients the Colossians. How much can you find out about them?

What impact do you think this letter would have had on the original recipients?

Looking a little more closely

Most of the believers in Colossae were illiterate. They had to rely on listening to the letter being read aloud. Then they could take part in the ensuing discussion. However, there were a few people in the church who were able to read. These people could serve the others by taking the letter home and studying it in a bit more depth. After all, Paul's letters were profound to say the least. Even the Apostle Peter said "...there are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist .." (2 Peter 3:16).

Think of yourself now as one of the few literate Colossian believers. It is your turn to take the letter home. You want to figure out just what Paul had in mind as he wrote this letter. Have a go at the following exercises:

The Words:

Note the key words in each chapter of the book (Look for repeated words and their synonyms).

Chapter One	
Chapter Two	
Chapter Three	
Chapter Four	

What do you notice about the words used?

What main ideas or themes are suggested by these words?

The Paragraphs/Sections:

List the paragraphs. Many bibles have section titles. You could use these or better still come up with your own. For each title decide what category each paragraph/section belongs to out of the following: teaching, prayer, encouragement, challenge, personal sharing, thanksgiving, greeting, practical instruction, narrative, other.

Paragraph	Title	Category	Notes

The Main Idea

Review the above sections and write a brief statement of the main theme of the letter. Can you find a key verse for the whole letter? Finally, give the letter a title which describes the main theme.

Statement:

Key Verse:

Title:

Extra biblical resources

Colossae

The city of Colossae was situated 100 miles east of Ephesus in Phrygia on the southern bank of the river Lycus (in modern-day Turkey). Colossae lay on the main road from Ephesus and Sardis to the Euphrates. In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. it was described as populous, large and wealthy, its commercial significance being due to its wool industry. Later the city declined in importance so that in Roman times it had become a “small town” and had been surpassed by Laodicea and Hierapolis which were close by in the Lycus valley and had become the trade, government and financial centers.

Colossae’s population consisted mainly of indigenous Phrygian and Greek settlers, but in the early part of the second century B.C. two thousand Jewish families from Babylon and Mesopotamia were settled in Lydia and Phrygia. According to grave inscriptions in the area Jews had become part of the Asian culture by the first century B.C. So the Colossae of Paul’s day seems to have been a cosmopolitan place in which differing cultural and religious elements mingled.

The Church at Colossae

The believers at Colossae, who are addressed as faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, were not converted through the ministry of Paul himself. This Christian community had been planted during a period of vigorous missionary and evangelistic activity while Paul was in Ephesus (A.D. 52–55), recorded in Acts 19. While the work was directed by Paul, he was assisted by several co-workers through whom a number of churches were planted in the province of Asia. Among these were the churches at Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis, which were the fruit of Epaphras’s evangelistic efforts. Epaphras was a native of Colossae, who may have become a Christian during a visit to Ephesus. He carried the gospel message back to Colossae.

The many allusions to the non-Christian past of the readers suggest that most of them were Gentile converts. They had once been utterly out of harmony with God. But God had effected a mighty change in their lives: he had reconciled them to himself through an earth-shattering event, namely, Christ’s physical death on the cross. They had now entered into a living relationship with God.

Occasion

Paul probably wrote Colossians during his imprisonment in Rome (about A.D. 60–62), when the church at Colossae was 7-10 years old. Epaphras had paid Paul a visit in Rome and informed him of the progress of the gospel in the Lycus valley. While much of the report was encouraging, one disquieting feature was attractive, but false, teaching that had recently been introduced into the church. This teaching if left unchecked would subvert the gospel. Paul’s letter is written in response to this urgent need. In this letter Paul is giving guidance to the Colossians about staying on track in the Christian life. In our university situations and in society at large we also have a melting pot of different thoughts, ideas, philosophies and influences. This letter will help us keep our thinking and faith on track. It will also help us to have real impact on those around us.

Paul

Paul was an apostle involved in spreading the gospel and watching over new churches. He was a Jew by birth, but his education was far from what a normal Jew would have received. His learning encompassed not only the Pharisaic approach to the Jewish law but also the Greek disciplines of rhetoric and classical literature. As a Pharisee, he believed that God had set him apart to study and live by the Torah (the law of Moses), and like a good Pharisee, he expected a Man to arise who would liberate Israel from the grip of Roman domination. Accordingly, when some Jews began saying that Jesus (who obviously hadn’t overthrown Rome) was this predicted Messiah, he stood against them with a vengeance. Paul first appears in the New Testament officiating at the stoning of Stephen. He went on “missionary trips” to areas outside of Palestine to bring back to trial believers in Christ who had fled for safety.

On one such trip to Damascus, Saul had a blinding encounter with Jesus Christ. This event lead him to turn from Pharisaism to a devoted obedience to the living and resurrected Christ. He ended up joining those he had been persecuting! Formerly he was a missionary against the church, now he became a missionary par excellence for the cause of Christ.

After his conversion to Christianity Paul engaged in three missionary tours, on his second tour stopping at Ephesus. From here the GoodNews spread to Colossae where a church was planted. At the end of his third missionary trip, Paul was arrested and sent to Rome. Here he did not abandon those with whom he had shared the gospel. While imprisoned in Rome he wrote several letters, among these the letter to the Colossians.

Add your own information on the background of this letter by consulting supplementary resources.

Some suggested sources:

- Bible commentaries
- NIV Study Bible Introductions and textual notes
- www.nextbible.org, www.e-sword.net, www.biblegateway.com

Creative presentation of “the occasion” of the letter

In the space below come up with some way to capture and communicate what Colossians is about. You can take anything from a “fine-arts” approach to an “engineer’s” approach.

Some possibilities: A picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, drama, monologue, dialogue, poem, sculpture, analogy, chart, timeline, diagram, outline, etc. Just let your creativity flow.

Your creation needn't be particularly comprehensive but people looking at (listening to?) what you have produced, along with your explanation, should gain a fair idea of what Colossians is about.

A simple example of creatively capturing the occasion of a text is the “word-cloud” of Barak Obama’s inaugural presidential speech.

For Colossians you could create a word-cloud (<http://www.wordle.net/>) to use as a starting point for explaining the “occasion” of Paul’s letter to the Colossians.



My creative presentation

Prayer for this study series

Now that you have a fair idea of what Colossians is about, take a moment to pray. For the weeks of study ahead, ask God to “open your eyes to see the wonderful truths in his instructions” (Psalm 119:18).

Can you see any parallels with your own situation? Write down any themes and issues which seem particularly relevant. Invite him to teach you and develop you in these areas.

3. Colossians 1:1-14

Starting Well

Have you ever seen someone make a great start only to fizzle out? Well, the new Colossians believers were off to a fantastic start, but would it last? Paul wrote this letter to make sure it would.

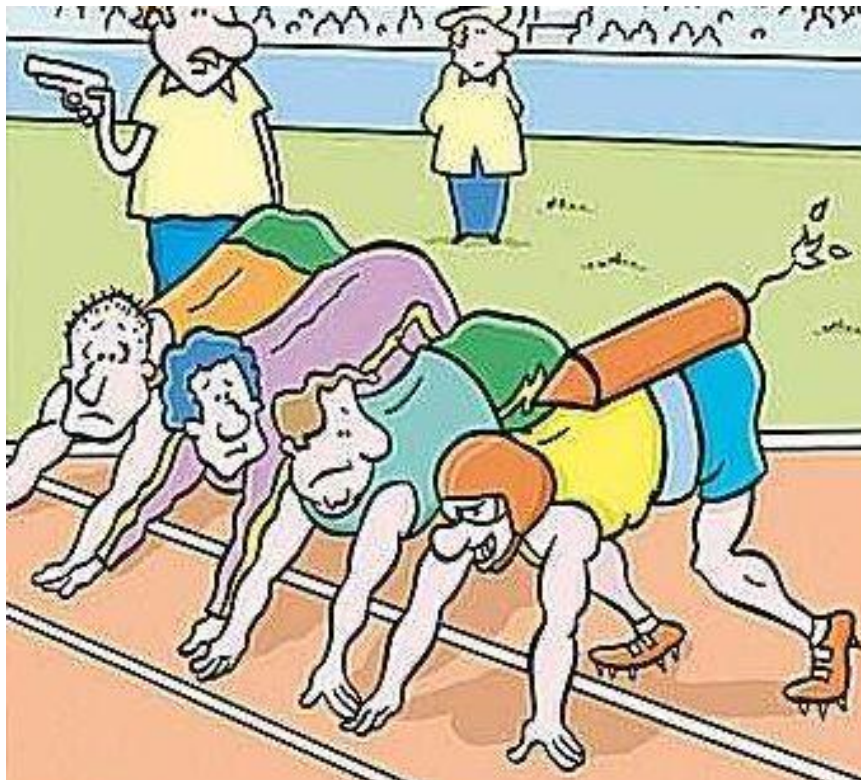
In the parable of the soils (Mark 4) Jesus said

“(some) when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.”

This idea of having sound foundations or roots is crucial if we are to survive and thrive in the real world away beyond the limited world of Christian activities and programmes.

This letter is all about developing those deep roots - knowing what you believe and knowing how “to walk the talk”.

In this first section Paul tells the Colossians how stoked he is that they have made such a great start. Then he lets them know he is doing some serious praying that it will get even better for them.



Observation

Make your own observations by noting key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, and events.

Try This:

From what Paul says (and prays) come up with a list of the qualities Paul wanted to see in the Colossian's lives.

Make as many observations as you can about:

1. Prayer
2. The gospel
3. Spiritual Growth

[1] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
[2] To the saints, the faithful* brothers and sisters in Christ at Colossae:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father.
[3] We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, [4] because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— [5] the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true word of the gospel [6] that has come to you. In the same way, it is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world— just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. [7] You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,* who is a faithful minister of Christ on our* behalf, [8] and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.
[9] For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,* [10] so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, [11] being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, [12] and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his people in the kingdom of light. [13] For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, [14] in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?

What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?
How could you respond?

Try This

Select a sentence that seems to be speaking to you.
Read it slowly several times, each time **emphasizing a different word**. Note down your thoughts

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from the passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions

Background

From IVP Background Commentary

1:3. Regular Jewish prayer times included many blessings, and Paul's prayer times clearly include many thanksgivings to God; hence this is not merely a conventional expression of thanks for the purposes of the letter.

1:4. The Colossians' spiritual condition was reported to Paul by Epaphras, apparently Paul's student working among them (1:7; cf. Ac 19:10), who was originally from their city (Col 4:12).

1:5. Jewish texts spoke of future rewards already reserved for the righteous, hence early Christian readers would be familiar with the idea.

1:6. The image of God's message bearing fruit may go back to Jesus' teaching (Lk 8:11); the Old Testament often compares Israel with a vine or other plant and summons them to bear fruit for God (e.g., Ho 10:1; 14:7-8; cf. Ge 1:28).

1:7-8. "Epaphras" was a common name; this may well be the same Epaphras of Phlm 23. But Philippi and Colossae are too distant geographically for us to think that this is the same person as Epaphroditus in Phil 2:25, although that name could legitimately be contracted as "Epaphras."

1:9. For unceasing prayer see Ex 28:30 and 1Sa 12:23. Although philosophers sought "wisdom" and "knowledge," Paul here emphasizes the Old Testament moral sense of the terms (e.g., Pr 1:2-7).

1:10-11. On fruit bearing and growing, see Ge 1: and see comment on Col 1:6. On "walk" (literally; KJV, NASB) or "live" (NIV, TEV), see comment on Gal 5:16. Greek temples expected priests to act in a manner appropriate to their priesthood, "worthy of the god" in whose temple they served, although it is not clear that Paul alludes to that language here. In Jewish tradition, "worthy" could mean "appropriate to" (2Ma 6:23-24,27), "deserving of (reward)" (2Ma 15:21); Wisdom sought those worthy of her (Wis 6:16), and the righteous who persevered would be "worthy for God," like an acceptable offering (Wis 3:5).

1:12-13. In the Old Testament, the "saints" or "holy" or "set-apart ones" were Israel. Israel's "inheritance" was first of all the Promised Land but in Jewish tradition pointed toward the ultimate possession of the world to come. Christians become heirs of these promises in Christ. "Light" and "darkness" were regularly contrasted as good and bad respectively (e.g., Ps 27:1; Isa 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 58:8-10; 59:9; 60:1), and this was often applied to the conflict between good and evil realms (in the Dead Sea Scrolls and often in ancient literature). (Since many peoples in the ancient Near East had been uprooted by powerful rulers and settled elsewhere, some scholars have suggested that this image lies behind the "transferral" from one kingdom to another here. But the image of a provincial achieving Roman citizenship or Gentiles accepting the yoke of God's kingdom in Judaism might have been more natural images to Paul's readers; see also comment on 1:14.)

1:14. "Redemption" meant freeing a slave by paying a price for that slave; in the Old Testament, God redeemed Israel from their slavery in Egypt by the blood of the firstborn and the lamb. This would fit the image of transferring a captive people from one realm to another (1:13). Philo also believed that the Logos, God's Word, participated in redemption; but this background might be more relevant if it were mentioned as part of 1:15-17.

Try to find answers to the following questions:

(From within the passage itself and also from cross-references):

1. What is the "*dominion of darkness*"? (use a concordance or bible software to look up words like "darkness" "Light")
2. How can we tell if someone has been "*brought into the Kingdom of the Son*"?
3. How does God "qualify" us "to share in the inheritance of his people"?

Try this:

Play detective and find out all you can about Epaphras. (use concordance or bible software to look up his name)

Questions

1. This section talks about both the gospel *bearing fruit* (v6) and believers (10) *bearing fruit*. Today many people seem to “accept Jesus” and stay much the same. From this section, what kind of changes should we begin to see if someone really puts their faith in Jesus Christ? See also Galatians 5:22-24, Col 3:5-14
2. What can we learn from this passage about how these changes take place? See also Rom 12:1-2, 2 Cor 3:16-18, 2 Peter 1:3-9
3. What do you learn from Paul about praying for someone you have never met? Check out some of his other prayers and see if you notice any similarities. Ephesians 1:15-19; 3:14-19; Phil 1:9-11
4. What does “love for all the saints” look like in our lives and in a community/group/church life? Check out John 13:1-17, 1 Pet 4:8-11
5. Faith, hope and love are three important qualities which Paul discusses elsewhere (Rom 5:1-5, 1 Thess 1:3, Eph 4:1-6). How do these qualities characteristically show up?
6. Which of these three qualities would you most want to grow in?

Creative stuff

Use this space to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

4. Colossians 1:15-29

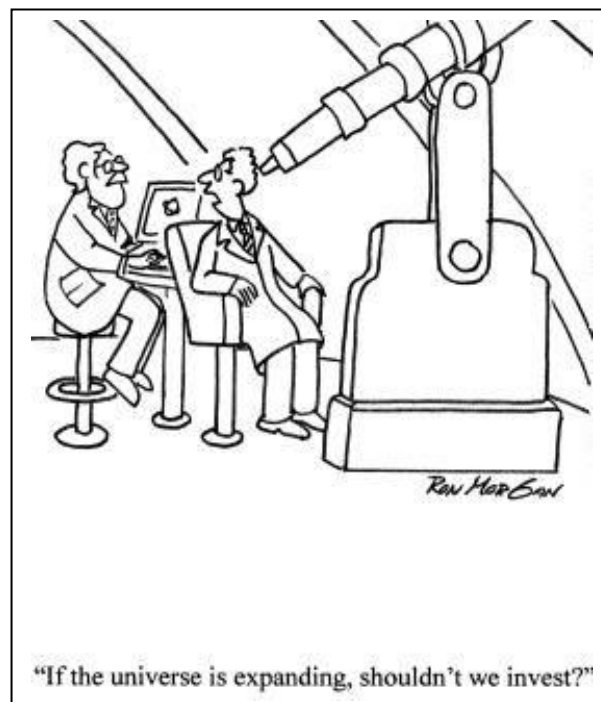
This is really big

In the previous section we saw that the Colossians had made a great start to following Jesus. They had begun to experience new life on a personal level along with a few of their friends, family members and others. But what was it all about? Was it just like becoming a member of a club, or joining a good cause? Just what had they really stepped into? How big was it all?

When we read the gospels we see the man Jesus, born in humble circumstances in a remote corner of the Roman Empire, gathering around him a small band of followers, doing and saying remarkable things, but in the end dying a criminal's death. It would be easy to underestimate him and consign him to history. But behind these human events things of cosmic significance were taking place.

This section begins to unpack who Jesus really is and what he was doing on planet earth 2000 years ago.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic -- on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg -- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. – Mere Christianity, pages 40-41.



Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, and events.

Try This:

Underline or circle all repeated words (Even the small ones) You might be surprised! What does this tell you?

[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; 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 behaviour. [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. [24] Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. [25] I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— [26] the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to God's people. [27] To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [28] We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. [29] To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

List as many facts as you can about Jesus Christ:

1. Who he is.
2. What he has done

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?
What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?
How could you respond?

Try This

Praise is telling God how much you appreciate him for *who he is*. This passage is all about *who Jesus is*. Take a few moments to praise Jesus using verses 15-19

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from the passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions

Verse 23. If it was a done deal and Jesus had reconciled the Colossians by his death once and for all, why did Paul say, “..... if you continue in your faith”? See 1 John 2:18, John 5:24, John 10:27-30, John 6:44.

Verse 24. If Jesus’ death was the complete perfect sacrifice (see also Col 2:13-15), why did Paul say “I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions”? (see 2 Tim 2:10, 2 Cor 4:11-12, Heb 10:14)

Try This

Word study. Choose one or two words you are unfamiliar with and try to find out as much as you can about them. Look them up in a dictionary, bible dictionary or Google. Consult bible foot notes. Check cross references. Try www.biblegateway.com.

Background

From IVP Background Commentary

1:15. Here Paul describes Christ in terms Judaism reserved for divine Wisdom, which was portrayed as God’s archetypal image by which he created the rest of the world. The Jewish writer, Philo, describes God’s Logos, his Word, as his image and firstborn son.

“Firstborn” could refer to the position of authority and pre-eminence given to the firstborn son in the Old Testament (Ge 49:3-4). This term could also refer to the redemptive role of the firstborn (cf. Col 1:14) or be another title for God’s “Son” (1:18; see Ps 89:27, although David was the youngest of eight sons).

1:16. The “invisible” creations of God refer especially to the angels in heaven who correspond to earthly rulers (see comment on Ep 1:19-23). Ancient Judaism accepted that God created both visible and invisible worlds. Many Jewish writers, including Philo, gave angels or subordinate divine powers a role in creation; other Jewish and Christian writers (like Paul) are prepared to combat that view, as here.

1:17. Many Greco-Roman philosophers said that all things were held together by Zeus or by the Logos, divine reason; by this they meant to emphasize the unity of the cosmos. Greek-speaking Jewish writers like Philo emphasized that God’s Logos held the creation together Wisdom existed before all things and through it God created and then shaped the world.

1:18. “Head” could mean “authority” (2:10), “most respected or honoured part” or “source” (2:19);

1:19 “Fullness” may refer to God’s wisdom or glory filling the world (as in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition), or to the fullness of God’s presence or attributes (as in Philo and other Jewish sources).

1:20-22. The reconciling even of the invisible powers (1:16) refers to their subordination rather than their salvation (2:15), “peace” being an end to hostilities. Paul denies not their continuing activity in the world (2:8) but their real power to challenge Christ’s kingdom.

1:23. “all creation” is meant almost certainly in a cosmic way (Isa 51:16), portraying that the gospel of Christ is for all peoples (Ro 1:8,13; Mt 24:14).

1:24. Paul suffers “for their sake” [NASB, NRSV], apparently meaning as their representative, because they are part of the church; it is certainly not vicarious suffering, because Paul clearly believes that Christ’s suffering was sufficient in that regard; cf. 1:14; 2:8-10,14.)

1:25. “Stewards” (cf. NASB) were managers of large household estates; they were often slaves or freedmen of high status.

1:26. The Dead Sea Scrolls and other texts speak of “mysteries” in the Scriptures that only the spiritually enlightened can understand; for Paul, Christians are now enlightened (1:9,12). This statement would refute mystics who claimed special, elite revelations belonging only to themselves (2:18).

1:27. That this mystery would be made known among the Gentiles had been prophesied (e.g., Isa 66:19) and was now being fulfilled (1:25). But no one expected him to dwell among the Gentiles - indeed, on the personal level, within them (Col 2:12; 3:4,16).

1:29. Philosophers commonly used metaphors from athletic competition, such as “strive” (KJV, NASB) here (the image is much rarer in the *Old Testament, e.g., Je 12:5). Divine empowerment “within” (NASB, NRSV) has few ancient parallels apart from Old Testament texts about the Spirit’s enabling God’s servants.

Questions

1. Many believe Jesus is a good person, or even a special person, but not God. Can you build a case for Jesus being God, beginning with this passage? See also Col 2:9-15, Philippians 2:5-11, John 1:1-5, Heb 1:1-4
2. Jesus makes possible personal forgiveness and salvation (v14) but he does far more than this. What else has resulted from and will result from Jesus' life, death and resurrection? (1:20, 2:15; see also Ephesians 1:10, 1:20)
3. Some believers seem satisfied when their friends "accept" Jesus Christ. Paul was aiming for more than this as he shared the GoodNews with those he met. What did he want to see happen to those who believed? (1:23, 28, 29)
4. God was on the move at Colossae. What do we find wherever God is at work? (1:7, 2:28-2:1, 4:12)

Creative stuff

Use this space to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

5. Colossians 2:1-23

Don't Get sucked in

In the previous section we saw how Jesus and what he did for us is at the very heart and centre of our faith. Everything revolves around him. He defines our world-view. So what happens to you when you talk to people who seem to have a very different take on life? People who seem relaxed and confident, and keen to promote their view? Do you get a bit freaked out or do you feel sure enough to confidently share what you believe?

Sometimes it is easier to have conversations with people who have a completely different world-view, where the differences are obvious (e.g. Materialism, Atheism, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.). It becomes a bit more challenging when others seem to have a slightly different version of what we believe; when they share some kind of basic Judaeo/Christian world-view (Judaism, Islam, Baha'i, various Christian cults and sects, some New Age groups, etc). Here the differences may appear to be subtle, but are in fact crucial. It is easy to get sucked in and take on-board ideas and practices that are in fact opposed to the heart of the Gospel. We need to remember that Satan, the Father of Lies, is much more likely to subtly *lure* us off track than to *bump* us off track. He loves half-truths. Incorporating other beliefs and practices into Christianity is called syncretism and it has plagued Christianity down through the centuries robbing Christians of their influence and freedom.

This chapter challenges us to be really discerning about what we believe and how we express our faith. This is especially relevant in a university context. A modern university resembles the ancient city of Colossae. It was a melting pot of Greek, Roman, Jewish and Pagan philosophies, ideologies and religions. Everything was up for grabs. It is the same at a modern university. Everything is debated. Everything comes under scrutiny. For some of us this is the first time we are removed from the influence of family, home-town, school and church. It becomes a formative time. This is a great opportunity for us to really develop our own convictions and grow deeper in our faith. This chapter will help us stay on track.



Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, and events.

Try This:

Underline words and phrases that seem to express strong emotion. Identify the emotions.

[2:1] I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. [2] My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [4] I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. [5] For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. [6] So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, [7] rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. [8] See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. [9] For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, [10] and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. [11] In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your sinful nature was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, [12] having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. [13] When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, [14] having canceled the statement of indebtedness, with its particulars, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. [15] And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. [16] Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. [17] These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. [18] Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such people also go into great detail about what they have seen, and their unspiritual minds puff them up with idle notions. [19] They have lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. [20] Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: [21] "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? [22] These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. [23] Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Try This

Ask these questions: Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? An error to avoid? An example to follow? A principle to apply?

List all the things Christ has done for you

What were some of the ideas threatening to subvert the Colossians faith in Christ?

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?
What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?
How could you respond?

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from the passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions

From within the passage and using cross-references try to answer the following questions:

1. What is the mystery of God? (v2)
2. What are the basic principles of this world? (v8 and v20)
3. What is circumcision? (v11)
4. When and how is a person made alive? (v13)

Try this:

Summarise the main thrust of the passage in a single sentence

Background

From IVP Background Commentary

2:5. Letters were meant as a surrogate for one's presence while one was absent, as ancient writers sometimes pointed out. Saying that one remained with someone "in spirit" was an expression of intimacy and affection. The point is intimacy, not metaphysical unity.

2:8. Because philosophy in this period grappled especially with moral and ethical issues, new Christians in the culture now struggling with the same questions would naturally be interested in philosophers' ideas. Diaspora Jewish writers praised "philosophy," and some, like Philo, combined it readily with ecstatic experiences (cf. 2:18).

"Traditions" characterized Pharisaic teachers in Palestine. Greek disciples also "passed on traditions" of their teachers' sayings.

"Basic principles" translates a term that can refer to the personified forces of nature, spirit beings or "spirits" as in Ga 4:9 (cf. Col 2:10); but here it may refer, as usually, to elementary principles. If this is the case, Paul affirms that the simple message of Christ is much more profound than the greatest secular wisdom could be.

2:9. Stoics spoke of the deity as being filled by all things, usually in a pantheistic sense; Greek-speaking Jewish writers modified this language to refer to God's rule encompassing all things. Jewish writings spoke of God's Spirit, wisdom or glory filling the world. Whatever precise sense Paul means by "fullness," he clearly means that access to all that God is and does is available only through Christ, a function ancient Judaism often attributed to divine Wisdom.

2:10. "Rule and authority" probably refers to the angelic powers thought to rule the nations of the world (see 1:16); a doctrine that is somehow central to the erring persons wishing to influence the Colossian Christians

2:13-14. The term translated "written code" was used for "handwritten" notes, usually "certificates of debt" with penalties attached. Paul intends his readers to think of an IOU before God. The Jewish people believed that their sins were forgiven when they repented; records of sins would be blotted out on the annual Day of Atonement. Paul says the atonement occurred when the debt was nailed to the cross in Christ and thus paid.

2:15. In 2:8 Paul used a word that could mean "take as a prisoner of war"; here the cosmic powers themselves are shown off as captives in Christ's triumphal procession, an image familiar to Romans and presumably known to others throughout the Empire. In Roman triumphs, the general dressed as the chief god Jupiter and led behind him humiliated captives, stripped of their possessions; prominent captives were the most impressive. Here Christ displays his triumph over the most prominent captives possible.

2:16. Asceticism was growing in paganism, and many viewed it as a means of achieving spiritual power or revelatory experiences. Judaism often took on the characteristics of the surrounding culture, and pagans sometimes associated local Judaism with asceticism even linking the sabbath with fasting.

2:17. Plato distinguished the "real" world of ideas from the shadow world of sense experience. Philo developed Plato's concept to argue that the invisible God was known through "shadows," or copies, of his character, rather than through sensory vision. Paul believes that the Old Testament prescriptions testified to genuine principles, but that those principles are fulfilled in Christ.

2:18. Jewish literature often conjoined "false humility" in a positive way with fasting. But when taken to an extreme, "humility" referred to ascetic practices designed to open oneself to "visions" and ecstatic experiences. Such practices became popular in second-century Christian asceticism.

"What he has seen" suggests that the erring people in Colossae may have been like the Jewish mystics who regularly sought to achieve the heavenly vision of God through ecstatic revelations of God's throne. Diaspora Jews addressed prayers and petitions to angels, a practice that overlapped with magical spirit invocations.

2:20-21. Most Jews outside Palestine still kept the food laws, and some Jews forbade even touching particular foods; other Old Testament laws explicitly decreed one impure for touching some things.

2:23. Pagan philosophers (especially Stoics) often spoke of freeing oneself from bodily pleasures so one could concentrate on the contemplations of the soul.

Questions

1. In your own words explain what Christ's death and resurrection have accomplished for you? (see also, Rom 5:1-2. Rom 8:1-4)
2. What are some of the tell-tale signs of losing sight of Jesus Christ and all he has done for us? (verses 4, 8, 16, 18, 20. See also Gal 3:1-5, 1 Cor 3:1-4). Have you ever sensed this happening in yourself? What helped you get back on track?
3. What should we do when we feel like we haven't measured up, especially when others share their impressive experiences or when they talk about all they are doing for God and the practices they are keeping up?
4. What aspects of others examples should we be challenged and inspired by? 2 Tim 3:10, Phil 4:8-9, Phil 3:2-17,
5. The Colossians were being influenced by things like angel worship and Jewish traditions. What are some of the false ideas and practices in the 21st Century that could undermine our relationship with Jesus Christ?
6. What is the difference between healthy self-discipline and legalism? Compare 2:20-23 and 3:5-17. (See also 2 Pet 1:3-9)

Creative stuff

Use this space to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

6. Colossians 3:1-17

These changes are real

The last chapter warned us about adopting dodgy faith practices based on faulty thinking. It seems whenever people get Christianity wrong it shows up in religious ways. The alarm bells should start ringing for us when there is too much emphasis on religious performance - things like praying, fasting and giving, and other religious rites and ceremonies. Jesus warned us about this in Matthew 6. He said we should avoid doing our “acts of righteousness” to be seen by people. Instead we should “let our light shine”, and by light he meant the light of new life. The real changes the gospel brings are internal and result in renewed character, transformed behaviour and loving relationships.



Two things to look at in this chapter are:

1. What does real change look like?
2. How does real change take place?

Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, and events.

Try This:

Underline all the imperatives in the passage.

Compare and contrast the old way of living with the new way of living

List all the reasons/motivations behind the new way of living

^{2.1}You know, brothers [3:1] Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. [3] For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. [4] When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [5] Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. [6] Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. [7] You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. [8] But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. [9] Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices [10] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. [11] Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. [12] Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. [13] Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. [14] And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. [15] Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. [16] Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. [17] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?
What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?
How could you respond?

Try This

Choose one of the positive character qualities mentioned in this passage. Define it using your own words.
Ask God to show you at least one practical way you can express it toward others.

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer.
Gather relevant info from the passage itself, cross-references
and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions

Background

From IVP Background Commentary

3:1-4. In Plato's famous parable of the cave, centuries before Paul, shadows on the wall merely reflected the real world above. Many people by Paul's day believed that the heavenly realms were pure and eternal, in contrast to the temporal and perishable world below. The Jewish mystics creating problems at Colossae were probably seeking these upper realms through mystical experiences (2:18), but Paul only mentions one thing specifically in heaven: Christ.

3:5-7. Paul speaks of their "earthly" body because the erring people influencing church members had adopted a Greek view in which one's soul was heavenly and eternal but one's body earthly, perishable and thus unimportant. Paul uses their own language ironically, to emphasize that it does matter what one does with one's body.

The sins Paul lists here are typical sins Gentile converts to Judaism would have committed before their conversion.

3:9-10. "Take off" and "put on" (NIV) may reflect the image of armor used by Greco-Roman moralists or Jewish tradition's occasional image of being "clothed" with the Spirit.

"Old person" and "new person" probably allude respectively to Adam, in whom the old humanity lived (in the light of Jewish concepts of corporate personality and the use of *'adam* as a term for "man" in Hebrew), and to Christ. An allusion to Adam is the likely import of "image" and "created" in 3:10 (see Ge 1:26). The language of "renewing" fits Jewish teaching about a new creation arriving at the end of the age, which Paul believes has been inaugurated in Christ, the new Adam (see comment on 2Co 5:17); it has come, but believers living out the life of the new age in the old age must continually realize their participation in this newness to behave accordingly. The renewal may also reflect the language of the Old Testament (Ps 51:10; cf. Eze 18:31), especially language about God's work in his people at the end (cf. Eze 11:19-20; 36:26-27).

3:11. Of all peoples in the Empire, Greeks, fiercely proud of their own heritage, were usually the most intolerant of Jewish people. Circumcision divided Jews from non-Jews. In the Greek language, which was widespread by Paul's time, "barbarians" technically still meant all non-Greeks. Scythians were generally considered the most barbaric, cruel and anti-Greek people. "Slave and free" was one major way of dividing humanity socially, although some slaves were more advanced socially than many free persons.

3:12-13. "Chosen," "holy" and "beloved" were all terms that the Old Testament applied to Israel.

3:14-15. Love often appears as an important virtue in antiquity (sometimes as the chief virtue in Judaism), but it appears repeatedly in early Christian literature as the supreme virtue, in a manner not consistently paralleled in any other body of ancient literature.

"Peace" (v. 15) probably means "among one another," in unity (v. 14); this virtue was highly valued in both Jewish and other Greco-Roman literature.

3:16. Whereas Ep 5:18-19 emphasizes the Spirit in worship, Paul in Colossians is concerned with erring persons who have not recognized the full sufficiency of Christ; he thus emphasizes the "word of Christ" here. On the worship see comment on Ep 5:19.

3:17. Ancient culture was pervasively religious, but most pagan religious practices were ritual observances that did not cast moral influence over one's daily life and ethics. For Paul, in contrast, every aspect of life must be determined by Christ's lordship.

What are "earthly things"(v2) and what is "earthly nature"(v 5)?

What does it mean to put something to death? How do we do it?

What can you conclude from this passage about how real change takes place?

What is the connection between outward behaviour and inner thoughts and attitudes?

Try this:

Draw a diagram, picture or illustration that conveys the meaning of the passage

Questions

1. What do you think of the statement, “He is too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use”? Or, “She has her head in the clouds”? In what ways does having an awareness of the spiritual and eternal realms help us live well now? See Matt 6:9-13, 1 John 2:15-16, 1 Pet 2:9-11
2. It is easy for some people to appear to be Christians without being born again. What are some indications that someone really is converted? Matt 7:16-27, Gal 5:22-26, John 13:34-35, 1 John 3:9, 1 John 5:1
3. What do you think is involved in putting off old ways and putting on new ways? How would you help someone who seems addicted to some destructive life pattern? Gal 6:1-2, James 5:16, Gal 5:16-24, Rom 8:13-15, Ps 119:9,11
4. What are some practical things you can do in your small group to help one another in this transformation process?
5. This passage provides a wonderful picture of transformed lives and relationships. From the list of vices and virtues share with one another where you are individually challenged and pray for each other.

Creative stuff

Use this space to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

7. Colossians 3:18-4:6

Jesus changes everything

Modernity loves to compartmentalise everything. In particular faith and spirituality are best kept personal and private. Post-modernity fragments things further. People are free to adopt and discard identities according to their circumstances and preferences. Everything is temporary.

This section shows that following Jesus touches everything in our lives. It is not private and it is not temporary. It dramatically and permanently changes the way we live in society. In fact, it transforms society itself.

"The Central doctrines of Christianity prompted and sustained attractive, liberating and effective social relations and organisations.....I believe that it was the religion's particular doctrines that permitted Christianity to be among the most sweeping and successful revitalisation movements in history the idea that God loves us, a coherent culture entirely stripped of ethnicity, liberating social relations, a new conception of humanity " **"The Rise of Christianity" - Rodney Stark**



Major Change

This section is quite short and may seem a little removed from university life. You are probably not married; you are unlikely to have any children; and you certainly don't have a nine to five job. But it may not be long before you have all three! The point being that this is a great opportunity to think through these things ahead of time and develop some good convictions. This study lends itself to a bit of cross-referencing.

Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, and events.

Try This:

Underline all the verbs in the passage. What do you notice?

[18] Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
[19] Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.
[20] Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
[21] Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.
[22] Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. [23] Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, [24] since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. [25] Those who do wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favouritism.
[4:1] Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.
[2] Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. [3] And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.
[4] Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. [5] Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. [6] Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

For each relational role list key behaviours and attitudes

List all the *motivations* for Christ-like behaviour mentioned in this passage

What do notice about how to share the GoodNews in verses 4:2-6?

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?

What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?

How could you respond?

Try This

Use this passage to pray for people you know in the various relationships mentioned (note: slaves=employees, masters=employers). Since you doubtless are in at least one of these relationships, use the passage to pray for that relationship.

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from the passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions.

Col 3:18-4:1 and Eph 5:22-6:9 are parallel passages. Develop a composite picture of the key instructions and ideas for the following relationships:

Parent/Child

Husband/Wife

Master/Slave

Try this:

For one of the categories of relationship addressed use a concordance, E-Sword bible software, www.biblegateway.com or www.bible.org to do a more complete cross-reference study. Summarise what you find.

Background

From IVP Background Commentary

3:18. All ancient moralists insisted that wives should “submit” to their husbands, but few would have stopped short of using the term “obey,” as Paul does here (cf. 3:20,22; see comment on Ep 5:33).

3:19. Although the ancient instructions to husbands normally stressed how he should rule his wife, Paul stresses instead that he should love her.

3:20. Throughout the ancient world (including under Old Testament law, Dt 21:18-21), minor children were expected to obey their parents; although Roman law allowed the father to demand obedience even of adult children, adults no longer living with their parents were normally expected only to honor their parents.

3:21. Most ancient fathers and educators beat their children as a matter of course; like a minority of ancient moralists, Paul advocates a more gentle approach to child rearing.

3:22-25. Ancient law viewed slaves as being property as well as people, and their obedience was expected. Many, however, considered slaves generally lazy. The admonition that slaves devote their work to the Lord relativises the master's authority (cf. 4:1); “not as menpleasers” (KJV) was also common advice in ancient Jewish ethics.

4:1. Aristotle attacked philosophers in his own day who said that slavery was against nature and therefore wrong. By contrast, Paul clearly believes all people are by nature equal before God; although he does not address slavery as an institution here, what he does write thus suggests that he does not favour it. Although he has no control over the system, he can warn masters to keep in mind their status before God. For an example of a situation in which he does have more potential influence, see Philemon.

4:6. “With grace” (KJV, NASB) can mean with gracefulness, pleasantness and so forth (closer to the classical Greek usage of “grace” than the usual New Testament usage); Paul probably refers to speech designed to make sense to outsiders and be relevant to them. When a particular rhetorician recommended salting one's words properly, he seems to have meant sarcastic wit; in this context, Paul seems to mean instead a gentle answer (cf. Pr 15:1).

Questions

1. Was Paul endorsing slavery? Why or why not? Check out Col 3:11, 1 Corinthians 7:21-24, Gal 3:27-28, 1 Tim 6:1-2
2. How could the principles underlying the section on Masters and Slaves be applied in a 21st Century Uni or working context?
3. Why do you think different qualities were singled out for marriage partners? Husbands - love and not be harsh, wives - submit and respect (Ephesians 5:33).
4. What happens when a husband's love and a wife's respect are eroded in a marriage?
5. What Paul asked people to pray for him as an itinerant evangelist, reaching out to strangers, seems quite different to what he wanted to see them doing as they shared their faith with their friends and contacts. What do you make of this? Compare verses like 1 Pet 3:15-16, 1 Pet 3:1, 1 Thess 4:11-12, Matt 5:16, with verses like Eph 6:19-20, 1 Thess 2:2.
6. Who are the non-believers you see most often in the course of a week?
7. What do you know about how they think about life? Beliefs, values?
8. What do you think they know about your faith?
9. As a group spend some time helping one another think about ways of communicating your faith conversationally with some of these people.

Creative stuff

Use this space to respond creatively and imaginatively to the passage picture, cartoon, illustration, poem, diagram, analogy, tale, joke, rave, whatever! Just let your creativity flow.

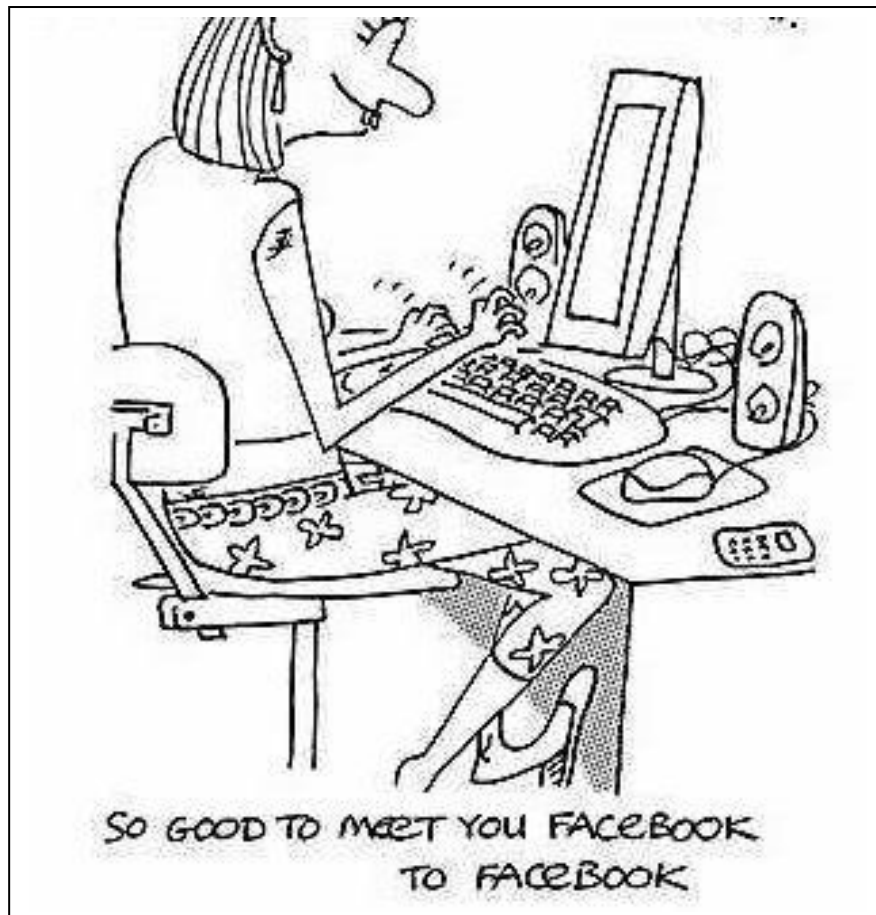
8. Colossians 4:7-18

Just a list of names?

It is a curious feature of the bible that dotted throughout it are lists of people's names. These people and their circumstances are often quite obscure to us. It is easy to gloss over them. But there they are in God's Word! Have you thought about this? Surely God is telling us something. His Book is not all about ideas and rules. It is supremely about real people; people in relationship with one another and with God.

This chapter is really a bit of first century Facebook! But it is social networking with a difference. It is networking for the Kingdom of God. The people in this list are everyday people teaming together to advance the Kingdom of God.

As you study this chapter let it challenge you to find people you can team up with to serve God. Let it challenge you to think of the various ways you can network with one another and serve one another.



Observation

Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, and events.

Try This:

List all the good qualities of the people mentioned in this section

List the various descriptive titles given to the people in this passage

List the various ways people in this network of Kingdom of God workers helped one another

[7] Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. [8] I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. [9] He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

[10] My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)

[11] Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. [12] Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. [13] I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. [14]

Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. [15] Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

[16] After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

[17] Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord."

[18] I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Response

What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires?

What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind?

How could you respond?

Try This

Choose one of the people mentioned in this list whose attitudes and actions challenge you. How could you follow his/her example? Be really practical.

Interpretation

Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from the passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions

Background

From IVP Background Commentary

4:7-8. News was often carried by word of mouth via travelers. Hosts usually asked their guests about people they both knew elsewhere. Such news bearing was thus normally only incidental, but Paul sent Tychicus for the purpose of bearing news.

4:9. Because Paul is writing from imprisonment (4:18), this Onesimus could be the same one as in Phlm 10 (cf. perhaps 2Ti 1:16), at a later period.

4:10. Both Aristarchus (Ac 20:4) and Mark (Ac 13:13; 15:37-39; 2Ti 4:11; cf. 1Pe 5:13) were junior colleagues of Paul in ministry.

4:11. "Jesus" (which can also be translated "Joshua" - TEV) was a common Jewish name. Many Jewish people used a second Greek or Latin name resembling their more traditional Jewish name, and this "Jesus" bears also the Latin name "Justus." That Paul sent greetings from Jewish and Gentile workers engaged in spiritual ministry together would have struck ancient readers as far more profound than most modern readers can guess.

4:12. "Striving" ("wrestling" - NIV, NRSV; "laboring" - NASB) is a term of conflict or athletic competition signifying great exertion; philosophers often used it metaphorically. Paul thus depicts prayer as a form of spiritual conflict or discipline crucial to their mission (4:2-4).

4:13. The three largest cities of the Lycus Valley in Phrygia were Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis; in this period Colossae was the least significant of the three. Hierapolis hosted healing cults, a temple to the emperor and the reported entrance to the underworld; it also had a significant Jewish presence in this period. Laodicea was a wealthy commercial center, despite its somewhat remote location.

4:14. Physicians were well educated but were often slaves or freedpersons, with relatively low social status. It is possible that Luke studied medicine in Laodicea (where there is evidence of a prominent medical practice) or practiced for a healing cult in Hierapolis (before his conversion); the readers seem to have heard of him.

4:15. Early manuscripts differ on the gender of "Nympha," but scribes would more likely change a woman's name into a man's name here than the reverse; hence the feminine form "Nympha" is probably original, making her leader of a house church.

4:16. Virtually all reading was done aloud, and letters to groups would naturally have been read to the whole group by one person, because most people could not read well. In a church service, Paul's letter may have been read alongside Old Testament Scripture, although it is unlikely that either Paul or his earliest readers guessed that some of his letters would become Christian Scripture.

4:18. Writers usually dictated letters to scribes but closed with a signature in their own handwriting.

This is one of several passages that reveal how much networking was going on in the New Testament church. Check out the following parallel passages. What do you notice? Rom 16, 1 Cor 16:5-24,

Cross reference the word **church** ("church in her house" v15) to see if you can form a picture of how the first believers organised their faith communities.

What does it mean, Epaphras "wrestled in prayer"?

Try this:

Find out all you can about the people mentioned in this section by cross-referencing. Use a concordance, www.Biblegateway.com, or www.bible.org E-Sword. Build a picture of the type of fellow-workers Paul had.

Questions

1. What elements of healthy Christian networking do you see in this passage?
2. Why is the kind of relating and communicating in this passage important? See verses 8,9,11,12
3. 1st Century networking was done by personal visits or by people carrying letters. It was very occasional and therefore very special. Now days texting, Facebook, and the like, make networking very much easier. What are the similarities/differences between this modern networking and the networking we see in this passage? See also Phil 2:19-30.
4. Who are some key people in other places you could network with? What are one or two things you could do?
5. Why do you think Epaphras's praying is described as wrestling? See also, Eph 6:12-20, Col 2:1-2, Rom 8:26-27
6. Are there people for whom your small group could "wrestle" together in prayer?

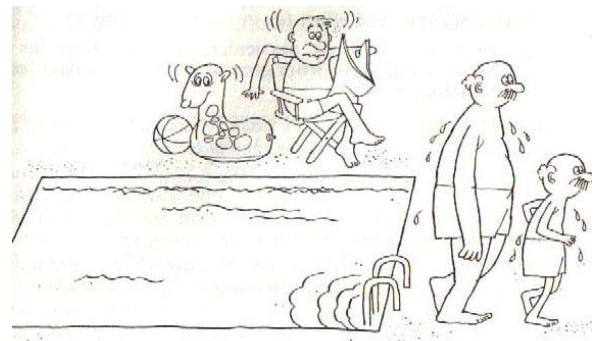
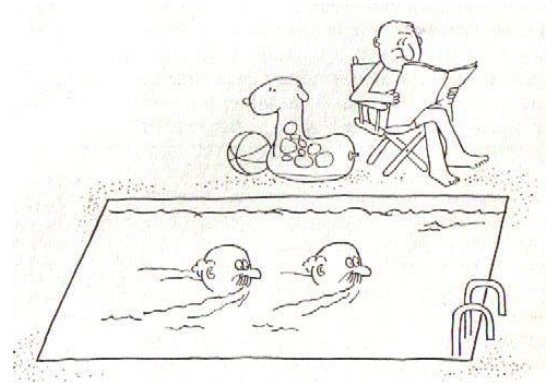
Creative stuff

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Study Method Ideas

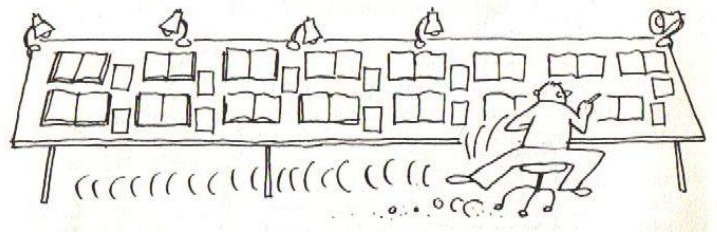
Observations

- Ask the “**Detective**” **Questions** - Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- Take note of the **emotional tone** of the chapter. What do you think Paul was feeling as he wrote these words? Underline words and phrases that seem to express strong emotion and identify the emotions involved.
- Read the passage from **different perspectives**. Read it from Paul’s perspective. Read it from the Colossians’ perspective. You could even read it as a complete stranger who found the letter on the street. What do you notice?
- Note comparisons and contrasts
- Gather all the info you can about **people** and **places** mentioned
- Note all **repeated** words, phrases or ideas. List the **themes** of the passage
- Underline all the **nouns** in the passage. What **topics** are developed?
- List/underline all the **instructions** given.
- Underline all the **verbs** in the passage. Note the **action** in the passage.
- **Draw lines** between related parts of the passage. You could circle or colour code them
- List any examples, illustrations or analogies
- Note any **linking** words that reveal the **logic/structure** of the chapter – if, but, because, therefore, then, so, also, etc.



Interpretation

- **Define** important words. Use a dictionary, bible dictionary or concordance to come up with a definition.
- Come up with **questions**. For each question, find at least one **cross-reference**. Find cross-references by recalling similar passages you have read before. Check your Bible’s cross-reference column and footnotes. Look up key words in the concordance at the back of your Bible or at www.Biblegateway.com, or www.bible.org, or use a bible software program like E-Sword. You may also find some good cross-references by skim reading the rest of the book.
- Find key passages that give important **background** information. It might be good to compare this book of the bible with other passages or books that address similar themes. What differences do you notice? How might the circumstances have been different?
- Find **background information** to culture and times from the bible itself or external sources. Use www.Biblegateway.com, or www.bible.org, E-Sword or IVP Background Commentary
- Draw a **diagram**, **picture** or **illustration** that conveys the meaning of the passage
- **Summarize** the main thrust of the passage in one short paragraph. It may help to first write a single sentence capturing the content of each paragraph in the chapter
- Develop an **Outline** for the passage. Break it into sections with a title for each section. Write sub points under each section title. Give the chapter an overall title. Try to keep the titles and sub points as succinct as possible. Outlining helps you identify the main ideas and see how they are connected.



Your Response

- **Write out phrases**, sentences or verses that seem particularly meaningful. Write down any feelings, memories, relationships, issues or situations that come to mind.
- Ask these **questions**: Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? An error to avoid? An example to follow? A principle to apply?
- Select a sentence that seems to be speaking to you. Read it slowly several times, each time **emphasising a different word**. Note down your thoughts.
- **Memorise** a verse that particularly speaks to you.
- Select a sentence that brings to mind a person or a situation. Use the sentence to **pray for that person** or situation.
- **Pray** your way through the passage. Read a sentence or two then stop and pray about whatever comes to mind. Invite the Holy Spirit to direct your heart and mind as you pray
- What does this passage say about **God's** character, purposes and relationship with people?
- What does this passage say about my **relationship with God**?
- What does this passage say about my **inner life** – my character, heart, behaviour, attitudes, my identity, my priorities and purpose?
- What does this say about my **relationships with other people**, my friends, faith community, family, 'neighbours'?
- What does this say about my **outer world** – my work, my studies, health, money, possessions? What does it say about the world I live in – the govt, environment, justice, arts...?

