



Found

HIDDEN IN THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

A study through the book of Colossians



Found
*Hidden in the
Preeminence
of Christ*

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This book is for you, Riv fam.

"So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, being rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude."

COLOSSIANS 2:6-7

**RIVERVIEW
EXISTS TO
PROCLAIM THE
LIBERATING
POWER OF THE
GOSPEL AS WE
GROW, SERVE,
AND GO.**

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Introduction

One of the biggest challenges facing the church today is the struggle to stay faithful to the truth of the Bible. In theory, the church of Jesus would always adhere closely to the Word of Jesus, but in practice it can be difficult to stand for truth. Basic fidelity to the Bible, which ought to be a given in any local church, can often get watered down or even lost in the midst of a changing culture.

This, of course, is not a new dilemma. Churches have always been called to contend for truth, and often there are competing voices. Such was the case for the first-century church in Colossae. Based on a normal reading of Paul's letter to the Colossians, it seems obvious that some poor theology found its way into their community of faith. Once Paul became aware of this threat, he quickly penned a letter to remind them of the roots of their true faith in Jesus. The result of Paul's efforts is the book of Colossians, a powerful and precise depiction of the person of Jesus Christ and His preeminence in our world.

As with Paul, my hope with this book is to challenge to you toward faithfulness to the Biblical text. The first step toward living the Word is knowing the Word. Grab a few others who want to be intentional about committing themselves to the truth of the Bible. This might be your Life Group, your family, your ministry team, or just a random group of friends. Just find some people. Then, find a regular time when you can get together to read and talk about Colossians, maybe eight to ten verses at a time.

Nothing fancy, just read and discuss, and feel free to use the articles and questions on the following pages to spark your conversation. Finally, and here's the key, yield yourself to God's Word. When you dig into God's Word, God's Word will dig into you. The truth and wisdom that the Colossians struggled to obey is the very same truth and wisdom that will encourage you, challenge you, and even convict you, because God's aim is to change you for His glory.

Early in Colossians chapter one you will find Paul's prayer for his friends in Colossae. He writes:

"Since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light."

COLOSSIANS 1:9-12

It is this same prayer I will be praying for you and for anyone else who picks up this book.

*For Christ,
Pastor James Granger
Riverview Church
February 3, 2019*

Background

In approximately 30 AD a young Jewish teacher named Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem because of His claims to be the Son of God. As it turned out, His claims were true. Three days after His death on the cross, Jesus conquered death, leaving behind an empty tomb and appearing alive in front of hundreds of witnesses over a period of 40 days before ascending to be with God the Father in heaven. In the time that has passed since the resurrection of Jesus, countless people have found forgiveness and eternal hope through their faith in the living Christ.

By the middle of the first century AD, news of Jesus was spreading like wildfire throughout the Roman Empire. The effort to proclaim the truth about Jesus was spearheaded by a passionate young missionary named Paul. Paul traveled city by city through the ancient world, and his faithful and persistent proclamation of the Gospel drew many people to Jesus. Many of those who decided to become followers of Jesus also became part of the movement to proclaim Jesus to various cities around the world. Others remained at home, becoming part of the new church that had been established in their town.

Colossae was one of many cities where the Gospel gained a foothold in the first century. Located in central Asia (now Turkey), Colossae was part of a “triangle” of cities (along with Hieropolis and Laodicea) located on the Roman trade route through the Lycus River Valley. These three cities are very close to one another in proximity (only about 5–10 miles apart),

so throughout history they have been linked together both in partnership and in rivalry. Because of its beautiful mountain setting, fresh drinking water, and unique ability to produce a coveted red wool, Colossae had once been a prominent center of commerce. However, by the time Paul wrote his letter to the church in Colossae (around 60 AD) the city was on the decline, possibly because of the growing appeal of its neighbor cities. Laodicea was on the rise as a center of banking and finance. Hieropolis is home to a desirable series of medicinal hot springs, and the Romans had established a military base there. Colossae had become undesirable. In fact, shortly after receiving Paul's letter, the city of Colossae was destroyed in an earthquake and was never really rebuilt. It remains unexcavated to this day.

Because Paul wrote a letter to the Colossians, many people mistakenly assume that it was Paul who founded the church there. Most scholars believe it was actually a man named Epaphras (Colossians 1:7-8), not Paul, who originally led the team that brought the Gospel to Colossae. History does not tell us much about Epaphras. We know that he was with Paul during Paul's Roman imprisonment (Philemon 23), and that he was highly esteemed by Paul (Colossians 1:7). It's possible that Epaphras was a disciple of Paul's, but we have no way of knowing for sure.

It is likely that Paul was in prison when he wrote to the Colossians, and that he had a bondservant named Onesimus hand-deliver the letter (along with a letter to Philemon) to the church members in Colossae. The letter itself is clear and focused, and it appears that Paul's intent was to provide Gospel clarity to a church that had become divided over theological issues. It's possible that similar challenges existed in the churches in Laodicea and Hieropolis, because in his fourth chapter Paul instructs the Colossians to make sure they share his letter with the churches in those neighboring cities.

1/11
Colossians 1:1-8

COLOSSIANS 1:1-8

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s will, and Timothy our brother: To the saints in Christ at Colossae, who are faithful brothers and sisters. Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. You have already heard about this hope in the Word of truth, the Gospel that has come to you. It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it has among you since the day you heard it and came to truly appreciate God’s grace. You learned this from Epaphras, our dearly loved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and he has told us about your love in the Spirit.”

REFLECTIONS

Paul begins his letter with his customary greeting of grace, peace, and thankfulness, and then moves quickly to a description of Gospel essentials. It is clear that Paul has theological concerns regarding the church in Colossae, and he addresses those directly by identifying several basic fundamental truths related to faith in Jesus.

Eternal Perspective

Paul's first aim is to establish that the Christian faith is driven by an eternal perspective. He describes the "hope reserved for you in heaven" that is obtained by grace through faith in Jesus and serves as motivation for followers of Jesus to demonstrate "love for all the saints." Paul's words provide an immediate reminder to the Colossian church, and to modern Christians as well, that there is nothing more important in this life than trusting Jesus for the next life. The Gospel in which we believe is a big deal because it is our only hope, not just in this life, but for all of eternity.

The Truth Of God's Word

Paul also makes it clear that the truth of the Gospel is grounded in the truth of God's Word. In stating that the "Gospel" and the "Word of truth" are one in the same, Paul establishes the written biblical Word as the unchanging foundation of truth. When a community of faith becomes divided over matters of truth, it is vitally important to rely on the wisdom of the Bible to determine the way forward. In addition, Paul affirms the significance of the Word by highlighting its impact. He says the Word, the Gospel, is "bearing fruit and growing" all over the world, and that it is the way to "truly appreciate God's grace." As Paul makes his case for truth in his letter to the Colossians, he is clear that he's going to rely on the Word to do so.

Proclaim The Truth

Finally, Paul reminds the “saints who are faithful brothers and sisters” in Colossae that the truth of the Gospel is to be proclaimed. He points out that the truth about Jesus is known to the church in Colossae because they “heard” and “learned” this truth as it was boldly proclaimed to them. He commends Timothy and Epaphras for their faithfulness in proclaiming the Word, and shares his genuine excitement in the fact that the Gospel has reached Colossae and is expanding across the world.

The issues facing the church in Colossae are serious, and Paul addresses them directly. He doesn’t mince words. The truth is at stake. His initial reminders to the Colossian church are equally relevant today. Keep an eternal perspective. Remember where your hope lies. Depend on the Bible as the source of truth. Make sure the truth of Jesus is proclaimed, so it can be heard and learned, and the Gospel can bear fruit and increase to the whole world.

OTHER VERSES

I Corinthians 15:1-6, I John 5:13, Revelation 7:13-17, Romans 10:13-17

TO CONSIDER

1. Where is your hope? Does your focus tend to be more on this life, or on your eternal future and the eternal future of others?
2. What is your source of truth? Is it the Bible? What are some competing voices?
3. What is your role in helping others hear and learn the truth? Who are you praying for, to hear about Jesus and believe in Him for salvation?

TO DO

God uses people to make Himself known in the world. In his greeting, Paul mentions two individuals, Timothy and Epaphras, who have lived faithful and consistent lives for the Gospel. Like Paul, these men chose to devote their lives to the cause of proclaiming Jesus to a world who did not yet know Him. Identify a few people who God used to help you hear and learn the Gospel. Take a few minutes to thank God for them in prayer. Send them a handwritten note, or shoot them a quick text or email to express your gratitude and encourage them to press on for Jesus.

MY NOTES

2/11

Colossians 1:9-14

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

"For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves. In Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

REFLECTIONS

Paul continues his exhortation to the Colossian church toward sound doctrine and Godly living. He does this by sharing the theologically rich prayer he and Timothy have consistently prayed for the saints in Colossae. Imagine how encouraged and challenged the Colossians must have been when they realized they were being prayed for so earnestly! There is much to be learned from this powerful prayer.

Pray Urgently & Unceasingly

First, we see that Paul and Timothy pray urgently and unceasingly. Paul says, “since the day we heard about this, we haven’t stopped praying for you.” The moment we realize that a brother or sister in Christ is lacking is the very moment to begin praying. Prayer is a first response. Begin praying immediately, and then keep praying. Paul senses that it’s a time of spiritual crisis for the church in Colossae. Remember, he’s in a prison cell in Rome, so he’s unable to travel to Colossae himself. What he can do is pray, urgently and unceasingly.

Pray Expectantly & Specifically

Paul and Timothy also pray expectantly and specifically. Because the Colossians have veered away from some of the fundamentals of the faith, Paul and Timothy pray for a return to God’s knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. They also pray for the Colossians to live fruitful and faithful lives, specifically for lives that are rooted in the strength and power that God alone can supply. There is a confidence in these prayers: an expectation that when the Colossian saints are reminded of the central truths of their faith, they will endure with lives of joy and thankfulness.

Pray Biblically

Finally, we see that Paul and Timothy pray biblically. Paul includes several powerful biblical themes in his prayer that serve as a reminder to the

Colossians of their position in Christ. Paul speaks of the “saints’ inheritance in the light,” namely that there is an unspeakably glorious future that awaits those who are in Christ. Then Paul says, in Christ, we have “redemption” because God has “rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.” In other words, we were once slaves to sin, but now, in Christ, we have been saved into God’s eternal kingdom. By emphasizing these fundamental Gospel realities within his prayer, Paul is undergirding the prayer with the strength of the Gospel and also urging the Colossians to turn away from the false teachings that may have infiltrated the church.

Often times churches (or individuals) face criticism when they are struggling theologically. When the Colossian church reaches a doctrinal crossroads, Paul and Timothy take it to the Lord in prayer. Their aim is to prayerfully guide, encourage, and restore the Colossian saints to the Gospel they had once received so they can walk faithfully in the strength of Christ.

OTHER VERSES

Numbers 6:22-27, Ephesians 1:15-23, John 17, I Corinthians 1:4-9, I Thessalonians 5:16-22

TO CONSIDER

1. Are you prayerful? Are you persistent in prayer? Are you expectant?
2. Do you walk in a manner worthy of the Lord? Specifically, is your chief aim to please God? Is your life marked by Gospel fruit? Do you persevere? Are you thankful?
3. What is the inheritance that awaits those who are in Christ? How does a person “qualify” to receive this inheritance?

TO DO

One of the most powerful ways we can love and encourage others is to pray for them using the truth of the Bible. Make a list of people you would like to begin praying for. This could be people in your family, your friends, or perhaps leaders or others in your church family. Then, make a list of Bible passages that you would like to include that would allow you to consistently and expectantly pray specific truths for the people on your list.

MY NOTES

3/11

Colossians 1:15-20

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He might come to have first place in everything. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.”

REFLECTIONS

Jesus is preeminent in everything.

To be preeminent means to be superior. The word “preeminent” comes from the Greek word “*proteuo*,” which means to be foremost, or to rank first. It’s where we get our word “prototype,” which is the original version of something. Thirteen times within six short verses Paul specifically references Jesus and emphasizes His preeminence in all things. He is superior. He ranks first. He is the prototype, the original version.

Jesus is preeminent in everything. Specifically:

- Jesus, being God, is the perfect, visible “image” of God Himself.
- Jesus is the prototype human, the “firstborn over all creation.”
- Jesus created all things “in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible.”
- Jesus is the source of all authority.
- Jesus is the purpose of all creation, since all things were created “for Him.”
- Jesus came first. He preceded creation. He is “before all things.”
- Jesus is holding everything together.
- Jesus is the head of the church.
- Jesus demonstrated His preeminence by becoming “firstborn from the dead.”
- Jesus is the superior human, as “God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him.”
- Jesus’ blood enabled reconciliation and peace between God and man.

The weight of Paul’s statements is purposeful and staggering. In the midst of theological divide within the Colossian church, Paul points them toward the preeminence of Jesus Christ. Jesus must be at the center of everything,

because He is the center of everything. He is superior. He created the world, He entered the world, He saved the world, and He is in complete control of the world.

In our culture today it is very common for individuals to assert preeminence in their own lives, as if we all know what's best for ourselves and have the power to make it happen. The Gospel says we can trust Jesus with our lives since we are here because of Jesus and for Jesus, and He demonstrated His trustworthiness by His resurrection from the dead. Paul reinforces these truths, hoping that the church in Colossae would anchor themselves in the Gospel rather than continue to be divided over theology.

OTHER VERSES

Genesis 1, Psalm 139, John 1:1-18, II Peter 3:1-13

TO CONSIDER

1. What are some prevailing views in our culture regarding the question of who created the world? Why does it make a difference theologically to know and believe that Jesus authored the universe?
2. Are you confident in the preeminence of Jesus? In what ways are you tempted to trust yourself rather than Jesus?
3. What are you thankful for?

TO DO

Go outside and look up at the sky. Breathe the air. Feel your heartbeat. Thank God for creating everything you see, for giving you life, and for sending Jesus to save. Develop the practice of thanking God daily for at least one thing you would normally take for granted. If you keep a journal, keep an "I'm thankful for..." list to help remind yourself of the preeminence of Jesus.

MY NOTES

4/11
Colossians 1:21-23

COLOSSIANS 1:21-23

"Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds expressed in your evil actions. But now He has reconciled you by His physical body through His death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before Him— if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and are not shifted away from the hope of the Gospel that you heard. This Gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a servant of it."

REFLECTIONS

As Paul continues through the first part of his letter, he continues to hammer the Colossians with the core Gospel essentials. He begins by reminding them of how far they've come in their faith through the power of the resurrection of Jesus. The saints in Colossae, who once were "alienated," have now been "reconciled" to God.

Jesus came to reconcile.

When a relationship is unreconciled, it means friendship is broken. Something has come between the two people involved. Although Paul is specifically addressing the Christians in Colossae when he says "and you," the "you" could be referring to any person. Because of our sin, each one of us is unable to be in a relationship with God on our own. The "hostility" in our minds and our propensity for "evil actions" leaves us separated from our Heavenly Father. Paul tells the Colossian church that "once" this was true, but "now" the friendship is restored.

Are you reconciled with God?

Once a person is in Christ, God no longer sees their unrighteousness because Jesus has become righteousness for them. Paul describes a follower of Jesus as "holy," "blameless," and "above reproach" in the eyes of God. Paul is heralding the essence of the Gospel; that persons who once walked in the darkness of sin are able to be reconciled to God through Jesus.

Paul finishes this section by urging the Colossians to stay the course in their faith. Remember, Paul wrote this letter to address the theological split that was occurring within the church in Colossae. It's likely that some members of the church were drifting away from faithful living as they strayed further and further from the core truths of the Gospel. Paul calls upon the church to avoid these false teachings, and to instead choose

to be “grounded and steadfast, not shifting” from the hope they have always found in the true Gospel.

OTHER VERSES

Romans 1:18-20, I Corinthians 15:50-58, Ephesians 2:1-12,
Philippians 2:12-18

TO CONSIDER

1. Are you reconciled to God? If not, what do you think is preventing you from being reconciled to God?
2. If you are a follower of Jesus, what are some words you would use to describe your “former self,” the person you were prior to knowing Jesus? How are you different now?
3. Do you ever find yourself drifting in your faith? How can you remain grounded and steadfast, to avoid shifting in your hope? What part does God’s Word play in helping you to continue in your faith?

TO DO

Find a friend and tell them the story of how you were reconciled to God. Then ask them to share their story with you. Thank God for the work of reconciliation He has accomplished in your lives through the blood of Jesus. Pray for one another, that you would be able to remain steadfast in faith and also be able to be ministers who proclaim the Gospel.

MY NOTES

5/11
Colossians 1:24-2:7

COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:7

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for His body, that is, the church. I have become its servant, according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the Word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to His saints. God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. I labor for this, striving with His strength that works powerfully in me. For I want you to know how greatly I am struggling for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me in person. I want their hearts to be encouraged and joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery—Christ.

In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I am saying this so that no one will deceive you with arguments that sound reasonable. For I may be absent in body, but I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see how well ordered you are and the strength of your faith in Christ. So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, being rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude."

REFLECTIONS

In this section, Paul's purpose in writing to the Colossians is stated explicitly for the first time. He says, "I am saying this so that no one will deceive you with arguments that sound reasonable." As he has done from the outset of his letter, Paul does not focus on the deceptive "arguments that sound reasonable" that are infiltrating the church in Colossae. Instead, he continually shines the spotlight on the Gospel fundamentals that form the foundation of their faith. Paul repeatedly invokes the name of Christ as he points to the centrality of Jesus Himself as the One in whom "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Paul says that the mission of his own life is to proclaim Jesus, and he urges the churches in Colossae and Laodicea to join him in this effort. He is very open regarding the difficulty that awaits those who labor as "servants" in their endeavor to "make the Word of God fully known." Paul tells of the sufferings he has endured, the amount of toil involved, and the "struggling" that is required in order to preach the truth of Jesus to unbelievers and help the Christians among them to mature in their faith.

Even though Paul is not physically present in Colossae, he offers the Colossian (and Laodicean) saints two steps to empower them to endure their current turmoil. His first plea is for unity within the church. He underscores the importance of them being "knit together in love" in order to avoid the deception of false teachings. He then reminds them of the "riches of complete understanding" that have been made known to them in Christ. Three times Paul references the "mystery" that was once hidden but now has been revealed through Christ, namely that once a person is in Christ they possess "the hope of glory," the confident assurance of their glorious eternal future.

There will always be tremendous effort and sacrifice involved when a community of believers strives to advance the Gospel. Proclaiming the Gospel is hard work. The problems that confronted the church in Colos-

sae are not uncommon. It's difficult to remain united when theological disagreements arise. Paul's clear and firm call to keep Christ at the center is what's needed most in a church that's in danger of losing its Gospel identity.

OTHER VERSES

John 13:1-20, Romans 5:1-11, Ephesians 3, Ephesians 4:1-6,
1 Thessalonians 2

TO CONSIDER

1. What are some common "reasonable arguments" (i.e. false teachings) that can bleed into a church community? How can they be recognized? How can they be counteracted?
2. Do you consider yourself to be a minister of the Gospel? What challenges does this present?
3. Do you have confident assurance of your eternal future ("the hope of glory") within you? Where does this confidence come from?

TO DO

Be an encourager. Make a list of people for whom you'd like to provide encouragement, and also a list of specific ways (phone calls, notes of encouragement, gifts, etc.) you might be able to offer encouragement to someone. Make a commitment to provide encouragement to at least one person each day for the next week.

MY NOTES

6/11

Colossians 2:8-15

COLOSSIANS 2:8-15

"Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ. For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ, and you have been filled by Him, who is the head over every ruler and authority. You were also circumcised in Him with a circumcision not done with hands, by putting off the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, when you were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive with Him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; He triumphed over them in Him."

REFLECTIONS

The early message in Paul's letter to the Colossians has been consistent and clear. He wants the church to stay true to the core tenets of the Gospel. He exhorts them to walk in the same Jesus Christ that they have received, in order to remain established in their faith. In using this language, he is calling them to maintain their focus on Jesus, because it is clear that Paul believes the threat of false teaching and division is looming over the saints in Colossae.

For the first time, Paul specifically identifies some of the kinds of things he wants the Colossian church to avoid, things that people sometimes believe in "rather than Christ." He warns them about four particular threats:

- **Philosophy** is the study of knowledge, ideas, and truth. Paul does not have any problem with critical thinking or healthy dialogue, but he does object to false teaching that's based on flawed arguments.
- **Empty Deceit** occurs when outright lies are used to discredit Gospel truth.
- **Human Tradition** consists of ideas that are historical or preferred in a given culture for whatever reason. Again, there is nothing wrong with human tradition, but the wisdom of the Bible must rank more highly as the source of Truth.
- **The Elements of the World** refer to the natural ways we tend to think and feel as human beings. Because of our sin nature, sometimes our basic assumptions can be in direct opposition to the core truth of the Christian faith.

Once Paul has finished directly addressing these heretical threats, he returns to his previous practice of repeatedly reminding the Colossian saints of the fundamentals of the Gospel. He talks about the spiritual practices of circumcision and baptism, emphasizing the symbolic significance of each in the life of a believer. He then, once again, points back to the significance of Christ, that through His death on the cross God made

us “alive with Him, “forgave us all our trespasses,” and has “erased the certificate of debt.” Over and over we see Paul reinforcing the same truths, making it clear that what is most important to Paul is to see Jesus at the center of the church.

OTHER VERSES

John 1:1-17, Acts 8:26-40, Romans 2:25-29, II Timothy 4:1-5,
I Peter 3:18-22

TO CONSIDER

1. What are some specific false teachings that are prevalent in our culture? In what way are these not according to the Gospel? How have you seen people “taken captive” by bad theology?
2. Have you been baptized? If yes, share the details of your baptism. If not, what is preventing you from being baptized?
3. How “rooted” do you feel in your faith in Christ? What are some specific steps you can take to grow those roots of faith deeper in order to “establish” your faith more strongly?

TO DO

We are midway through Colossians 2, and Paul has already specifically mentioned at least a dozen different spiritual blessings we have in Christ. Take a few moments to read back through the first two chapters of Colossians, keeping a list of each of these “blessings” as you go. For the next week, take a few minutes each day to read through this list and thankfully reflect on God’s grace and generosity.

MY NOTES

7/11

Colossians 2:16-23

COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

"Therefore, don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is Christ. Let no one condemn you by delighting in ascetic practices and the worship of angels, claiming access to a visionary realm. Such people are inflated by empty notions of their unspiritual mind. He doesn't hold on to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and tendons, grows with growth from God. If you died with Christ to the elements of this world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations: "Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch?" All these regulations refer to what is destined to perish by being used up; they are human commands and doctrines. Although these have a reputation for wisdom by promoting self-made religion, false humility, and severe treatment of the body, they are not of any value in curbing self-indulgence."

REFLECTIONS

Paul's letter takes a sharp turn here, as he now directly addresses one of the specific controversies that has plagued the church in Colossae. There was a dangerous form of legalism being taught by some people who were part of the church. There are five specific aspects of this false teaching that Paul rejects:

- The questions of **food and drink** were related to an errant belief that abstaining from certain kinds of foods and drinks (probably wine) made a person more "holy" or "spiritual."
- The debate about **festivals or new moon or a Sabbath** revolved around the false teaching that participation in religious holy days or feasts would lead to a higher spiritual awareness or status.
- **Asceticism** is the belief that rigorous self-discipline makes one more holy.
- When Paul references the **worship of angels** and goes into detail about visions, he is addressing the false worship of angels and the belief that those who focused on angel worship would receive divine visions with specific details about their lives.
- Being **inflated by empty notions of their unspiritual mind** means just what it says, that there are those who feel spiritually superior because of themselves, rather than finding their identity in Christ.

As Paul addresses these issues directly, it is easy to imagine rising tension within the Colossian church. Paul again moves quickly to squash these divisions by pointing the saints back to Christ Himself as the center of the Christian faith. He implores them to "hold on to the Head," which is Jesus, because it is through Jesus (not asceticism, angel worship, etc.) that the whole body of Christ is "nourished." Paul wants them to "grow with a growth that is from God," rather than hold the belief that spiritual strength is gained through individual effort.

Paul then questions why a believer in Jesus would choose to submit themselves to worldly regulations rather than follow the cross of Christ. He argues that “human commands and doctrines,” while they may indeed have “a reputation of wisdom,” actually hold “no value” because they are temporary and will soon perish. It is better to put your trust in Christ, because He alone is the source of wisdom and truth, and He alone can save for eternity.

OTHER VERSES

Romans 14:1-23, I Corinthians 8:1-13, Ephesians 4:1-16, I Timothy 4:1-16

TO CONSIDER

1. Did you grow up believing that worldly disciplines (attending church, not drinking alcohol, avoiding certain behaviors) had saving power? When did you come to realize that salvation comes through Christ alone?
2. Are you spiritually nourished? Are you growing with a growth that is from God?
3. What are the “elements of the world” (regulations, worldly precepts, self-made religion, etc.) you are tempted to submit to? What does Christ offer that no worldly teaching can offer?

TO DO

The best way to nourish yourself spiritually is through the wisdom of God’s Word. Select a Bible verse you find encouraging or challenging. Write the verse on a note card, and carry it with you or post it somewhere you can see throughout the day. Reflect on your verse each day, with a goal of having it memorized by the end of the week.

MY NOTES

8/11

Colossians 3:1-17

COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

"So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, God's wrath is coming upon the disobedient, and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator. In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

REFLECTIONS

The doctrinal momentum that Paul has been building throughout his letter culminates in one of the most spectacular and theologically rich passages in the entire Bible. Having denounced many of the heretical teachings that were causing division in the Colossian church, Paul now resumes his relentless efforts to return these saints to the Gospel they believed from the beginning.

Paul first reminds the Colossians that there is a glorious future that awaits them in Christ, and that they should dwell on eternal things rather than earthly ones. It is essential for followers of Jesus to develop this mind-set toward “the things above” because, as Paul says in his letter, that’s “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” Paul says that being mindful of the reality that you have been “raised with Christ” ought to impact a your life while you are on the earth. The promise of a heavenly future with Jesus should generate a desire to “put to death” our earthly longings. Paul lists multiple specific sinful desires (sexual immorality, anger, slander, etc.) that ought to weaken as the eternal focus grows stronger.

Paul also notes that as a Christian increases their focus on eternity the lure of partiality will decrease. Partiality is the tendency toward favoritism that results from evaluating people based on earthly standards. The belief that one kind of person “ranks” more highly than another, for whatever reason, can lead to division within a church community. With the Gospel, the playing field is level. Everyone is the same. No one can “earn” their place in heaven, and anyone and everyone is invited to become a follower of Jesus. Instead of showing partiality, Paul implores the Colossian saints to exhibit a level of unity that is befitting of the Gospel. To contrast the lengthy list of sinful behaviors he warned against earlier, Paul provides a similar list of biblical attitudes (compassion, humility, patience, etc.) that promote love and harmony within the body of Christ.

OTHER VERSES

John 13:1-17, Galatians 5:16-26, Ephesians 4:1-16, Philippians 3:8-21,
II Peter 3

TO CONSIDER

1. What are some examples of “partiality” (unfair favoritism) you’ve witnessed in our culture? How is this kind of partiality in opposition to the Gospel?
2. Read back through the list of earthly practices Paul warns against. Which ones do you struggle with the most? How does an eternal perspective impact your ability to resist the temptation of sin?
3. Now read back through the list of biblical attitudes Paul promotes. Which of these do you struggle with the most? How does an eternal perspective impact your ability to live in unity with other followers of Jesus?

TO DO

It’s important for followers of Jesus to deal directly with complaints against one another. If you are aware of division between yourself and another Christian, take the necessary steps to pursue reconciliation. Make sure you approach your situation with prayerful humility.

MY NOTES

9/11
Colossians 3:18-4:1

COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1

"Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and don't be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they won't become discouraged. Slaves, obey your human masters in everything. Don't work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism. Masters, deal with your slaves justly and fairly, since you know that you too have a Master in heaven."

REFLECTIONS

One of the ways God provides direction and accountability to His followers is through authority in human relationships. It is possible that some unhealthy patterns had developed in the Colossian church, which could be why Paul provides specific instructions, both for those in authority and those who are under authority.

He begins with a discussion of family relationships. One of the reasons God has established spiritual authority within the family is to help us grow in our understanding of Him. He urges husbands to love their wives, and wives to submit to their husbands, because the human marriage relationship is a picture (albeit a flawed one) of the relationship between Christ and the church. The same spiritual symbolism exists within the relationship between parents and children. God exists as our heavenly Father, and we are His children. If there were members of the church in Colossae who were abusing their authority, or not properly yielding to authority in their family, this would be of major concern to Paul. This is why he makes clear, imperative statements, because it is “fitting in the Lord” and “pleases the Lord” that we model His love within our families.

For similar reasons, Paul also gives explicit instruction to “slaves,” who had every reason to be resistant to their masters. Paul, however, insists that they conduct themselves in sincere obedience to their masters, even if they are poorly treated, because in doing so they are “serving the Lord Christ.” Likewise, Paul implores masters to be just and fair in their treatment of their bondservants, “know(ing) that you too have a Master in heaven.” Again, earthly relationships have bigger meaning than just their impact on earth. Establishing healthy dynamics within relationships of authority in the church is critical to maintaining unity in the church as a whole.

OTHER VERSES

Genesis 2:4-25, Romans 13:1-7, Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Peter 3:1-12

TO CONSIDER

1. Do you view human authority as also being God's authority in your life? When do you find this most challenging?
2. How do you handle situations where you are the person in authority? Are you a servant leader? Do you lay down your life, the way Jesus your Master laid down His life for you?
3. Do you tend to work more for the approval of men or for the approval of the Lord? How would it change your mindset (as a parent, child, spouse, boss, employee, etc.) if your sole aim was to please God in everything you did?

TO DO

Think of someone (a parent, leader, coach, etc.) who has exercised authority over you in a humble and sacrificial manner. Contact that person this week to thank them for their wise and Godly leadership in your life. Take a few moments to pray for wisdom and grace for those people who currently hold positions of leadership in your life.

MY NOTES

10/11

Colossians 4:2-6

COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

“Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, so that I may make it known as I should. Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.”

REFLECTIONS

Most of Paul's letter thus far has been focused inward, addressing issues of division and disagreement within the Colossian church. This section is focused outward, with the emphasis on proclaiming the truth of Jesus to those who are "outsiders" in the faith. Ultimately, Paul's motivation for spending so much time pleading for unity among the Colossian saints is that they would be able to expand their Gospel outreach. He wants them to set aside the various distractions so they can be intentional and Christ-centered in prayer, the way they live, and their manner of speech.

The first step in the effort to reach people with the message of Jesus is prayer. Paul first asks for prayer for God to open a door so they (Paul and Timothy) would be able to "speak the mystery of Christ." It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that a person comes to faith in Jesus, so it makes sense that Paul would make this plea for prayer. Paul also asks for prayer for their declaration of the Gospel to be clear. Again, the outcome of any Gospel conversation is completely dependent on God's wisdom and timing, which Paul knows as well as anyone since he spent most of his adult life as a preacher. His appeal is for the Colossians to rediscover their heart for Jesus by being steadfast, watchful, and thankful in prayer.

Paul then gives the Colossians instruction about interacting with those outside the faith. He tells them it's important how they walk, and it's important how they speak. Your walk (the way you live) ought to be filled with wisdom. Don't waste time. Be intentional about how you live your life. Your speech (the words you say) should be flavored with grace, and you should consider the perspective of the other person in the conversation.

OTHER VERSES

Matthew 28:16-20, Romans 10:1-17, I Corinthians 15:1-11, I Peter 3:13-18

TO CONSIDER

1. What is your strategy and practice when it comes to praying for the mission of the church to reach non-believers?
2. Are you confident in your ability to share the Gospel with someone if you are asked? Have you had any opportunities recently to do so? What could you do to increase your confidence in this area?
3. Is your speech always gracious? Do you work hard to understand the other person's perspective? How can you grow in this area of your life?

TO DO

Make a list of people you interact with on a regular basis who do not yet have a relationship with Jesus. Pray for these folks each day this week, that God will open a door for you (or someone else) to declare Christ to them in a clear and engaging manner. Ask a friend to help increase your confidence by rehearsing in advance some of the conversations you hope to have with those who don't yet know Jesus.

MY NOTES

11/11

Colossians 4:7-18

COLOSSIANS 4:7-18

“Tychicus, our dearly loved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and so that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with Onesimus, a faithful and dearly loved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you greetings, as does Mark, Barnabas’ cousin (concerning whom you have received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), and so does Jesus who is called Justus. These alone of the circumcised are my coworkers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. He is always wrestling for you in his prayers, so that you can stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills. For I testify about him that he works hard for you, for those in Laodicea, and for those in Hierapolis. Luke, the dearly loved physician, and

Demas send you greetings. Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her home. After this letter has been read at your gathering, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. And tell Archippus, "Pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord, so that you can accomplish it." I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you."

REFLECTIONS

Paul closes his letter by encouraging the Colossians (as well as the Laodiceans) with greetings from a number of prominent leaders in the early church. His aim is to encourage the Colossian church all the more, and to make his strong message even stronger by making it known that there are a bunch of faithful saints around the world who are in agreement.

Paul identified nine people by name in the closing words of his letter:

- **Tychicus** was one of Paul's most trusted traveling companions. He helped Paul share the Gospel, was with Paul during imprisonment, and was probably one of the people who actually delivered Paul's letter to the Colossians.
- **Onesimus** was a former slave to a Colossian citizen by the name of Philemon. He came to faith in Christ through his relationship with Paul, and also helped deliver Paul's letter to the Colossians.
- **Aristarchus** was a Thessalonian convert who was imprisoned in Rome with Paul.
- **Mark**, "Barnabas' cousin," is believed to be the same "John Mark" who wrote the Gospel of Mark. He accompanied Paul, along with Barnabas, on their first missionary journey, but ended up splitting off on his own because of disagreement between he and Paul. The fact that Paul includes Mark in this letter shows that there has likely been reconciliation between them.
- **Justus** is only mentioned once in the Bible, so we don't know much about him.
- **Epaphras** is believed to be the man who planted the church in Colossae, and also helped launch the church in nearby Hierapolis and Laodicea. He would have been well known and greatly respected within the Colossian church.

- **Luke** was very esteemed in the early church, having written the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.
- **Demas** was with Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome. It appears that later on, after this letter was written, Demas struggled with his faith and no longer participated in missionary work.
- **Nympha** is mentioned just this one time in the Bible as the host of a house church in Laodicea.

Although Paul's final words are specifically addressed to a man named Archippus (probably a church leader in Colossae), his words are applicable to the entire church in Colossae and to Christians throughout history. He wrote, "pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord," which seems to accurately represent Paul's overall goal in writing the letter to the Colossians.

OTHER VERSES

Matthew 18:15-22, Acts 1:1-11, Romans 16, Hebrews 11

TO CONSIDER

1. Who are some prominent saints (alive or dead) who have made an impact on your walk with Christ? How have they specifically affected you?
2. At least three of the men (Onesimus, Mark, and Demas) mentioned in Paul's epilogue are known to have, at one time, been involved with a conflict within the work of the church. How do you handle conflict with other believers? Are you aware of the biblical imperatives when it comes to dealing with personal conflict?
3. What is the "ministry you have received in the Lord?" How well do you believe you are fulfilling that ministry?

TO DO

Review your notes and the teachings you've heard from the entire book of Colossians. Write down two or three specific practices or mindsets you'd like to maintain. Share this list with a close friend, your spouse, or a small group of friends, and ask them to pray with you and for you as you move forward with new intent.

MY NOTES

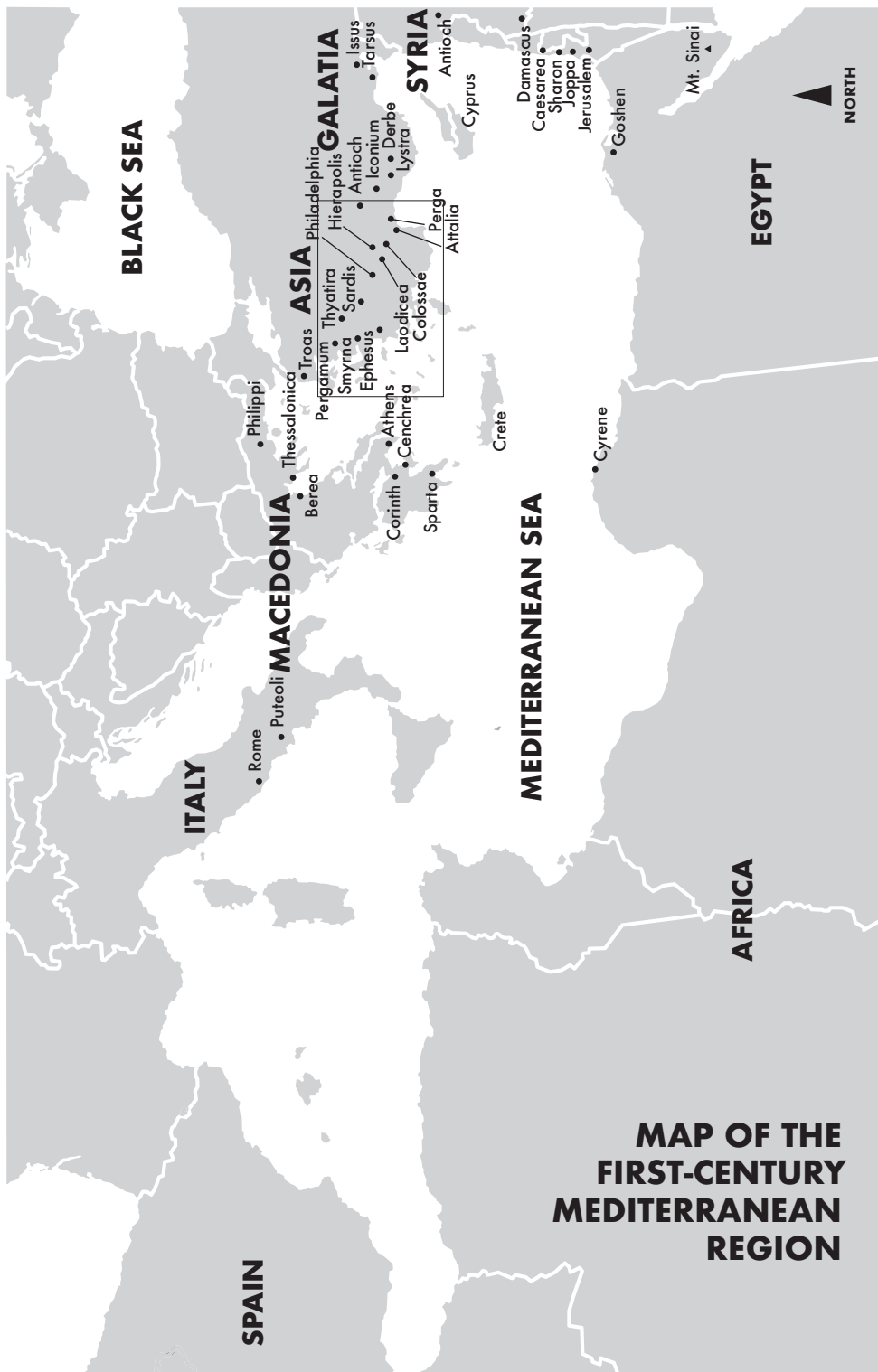
Final Thoughts

The message of the book of Colossians is very simple: Jesus Christ is preeminent, so keep the church focused on Him. Unfortunately, this simple message does not always translate into reality. The saints in Colossae had lost their way. They needed correction and a renewed commitment to the essentials of the Gospel. Paul's pointed letter serves as a needed reminder and warning to Christians across all generations that there is nothing more important than remembering the glory of Christ and living your life accordingly.

Paul ended his letter by recognizing many of the faithful people who partnered with him in his efforts to reach the world with the truth of Jesus. I want to thank the dedicated staff and key volunteers of Riverview Church for their tireless Gospel work. I am grateful for Josh Michels, Cody Seelye, Emma Heikkinen, Joel DeJong, Whitney Scharer, Pastor Tony Pyle, Pastor Noel Heikkinen, and my wife Laura, for their help with editing, formatting, and producing this study guide. As Paul says in Colossians 1:27-28, our sincere desire is that this resource will remind you of the "glorious wealth" of the Gospel, that is "Christ in you, the hope of glory," so that you would "proclaim Him" with your very lives.

*For Christ,
Pastor James Granger
February 3, 2019*

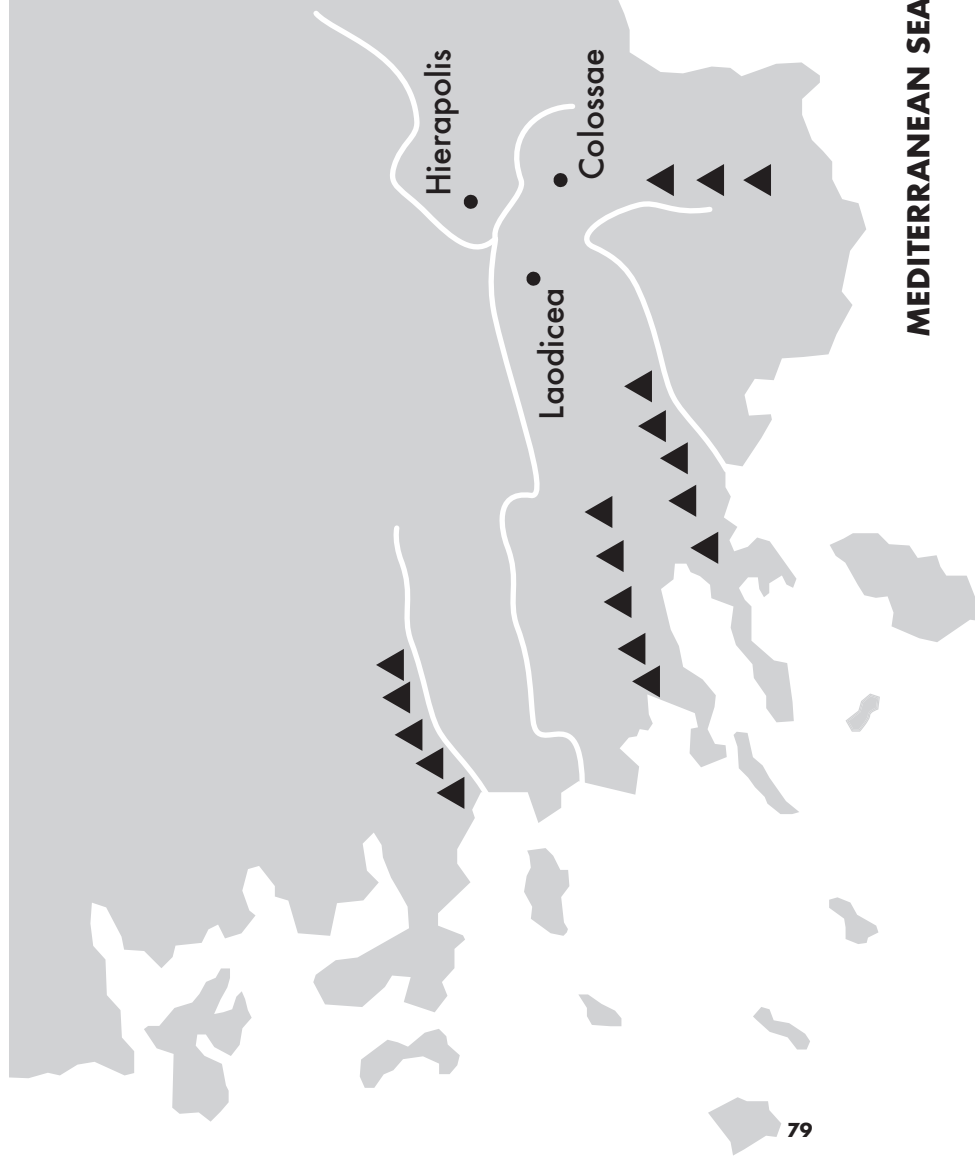
Other Resources



MAP OF THE "TRIANGLE" CITIES



MEDITERRANEAN SEA





MESSAGE VIDEOS

This book has corresponding messages that were taught at Riverview Church in early 2019. Visit rivchurch.com or download Riverview Church's app by searching "rivchurch" in your App Store to view the message videos.

A digital version of this book, Life Group conversation starters, and other resources can be viewed and downloaded by visiting rivchurch.com/found.