



PARTICIPANT GUIDE



Study Through the Bible

Colossians: Against the Tide

OVERVIEW OF COLOSSIANS

Study 1: **HOW TO PLEASE GOD**

Study 2: **AN EASY LIFE OR A GREAT LIFE?**

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Study Through the Bible

Colossians

Why read this book?

Some people have been surprised to discover something new about a friend they thought they knew well. That's one of the exciting things about a relationship with Christ: there's no limit to the things we can learn about him. Reading Colossians is one way we can discover a few more things about Jesus and learn how we can honor him.

Who wrote this book and to whom was it written?

While under house arrest in Rome, the apostle Paul wrote to believers in the small city of Colosse, located in the southwest interior of what is now Turkey.

When was it written?

About A.D. 60 to 62, during the time Paul awaited trial on an appeal to the Roman emperor Nero.

Why was it written?

A group called Gnostics (derived from the word for *knowledge*) claimed that they possessed privileged supernatural knowledge necessary for salvation. Paul wrote to warn about the subtle arguments and false teachings that threatened to undermine the Colossians' faith.

What is the background of this book?

Epaphras, a disciple of Paul, had founded the church at Colosse. Now it was under constant pressure from the numerous religious philosophies abounding in the first-century world. Colosse seems to have become a center for Gnosticism, a hybrid religion and philosophy that mixed Christian, Jewish, and possibly pagan beliefs.

What to look for in Colossians:

The supremacy of Christ and what that means for our everyday lives. Look for insights that show specific ways we can develop attitudes and actions to honor the Lord.

From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)



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Study Through the Bible

Colossians: Against the Tide - Study 1

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

How to Please God

*To please God we need to love him enough to make a difference
in the way we act, think, and live.*

Colossians teaches principles for living a Christian life in the midst of a non-Christian culture. Sometimes this calls for us to stand against the tide of public opinion or popular trends. In chapter one, Paul tells the Colossian Christians that he prays for them on a regular basis, asking God to “fill [them] with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” He goes on to say, “We pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way...” This study will examine four components of living a life pleasing to God.

Scripture:

Colossians 1:1–14

Based on:

The “Against the Tide” sermon series by Steve May, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Our goal should be to please God in all that we do. However, you cannot work your way into heaven or a right relationship with God. If you want to come alive spiritually, you must be born again. You must surrender your life to Christ and ask him to forgive your sins, fill you with the Holy Spirit, and make you into a brand new person. When you do that, he makes you spiritually alive, and then you're ready and able to do good works. Paul says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). Then, he goes on to say, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10).

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We please God by doing good works.

1. What has God given you the ability to do?
2. What has God given you the desire to do?
3. What has God given you the opportunity to do?

Teaching point two: We please God by getting to know him.

[Q] How do the following statements show how we might try to make God into an image that pleases us rather than getting to know him as he truly is? How can we move past these feelings of wanting to make God comfortable to us?

1. I never read the Old Testament because God seems so vengeful.
2. All passages of Scripture that portray women in an unsavory light offend me.
3. Any mention of hell in the Scriptures is archaic and outdated.
4. I only read the passages in Scripture that make me feel good.
5. I never read passages of Scripture that seem politically incorrect.

Teaching point three: We please God by enduring with patience.

Teaching point four: We please God by having a thankful heart.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

We love God with our strength when we do good works; we love God with our mind when we seek to know him; we love God with our soul when we yield ourselves to him and allow him to



fill our souls with his power; we love God with our hearts when we joyfully express our gratitude to him for all he has done.

This is what pleasing God is about—that we love him to the extent that it makes a difference in the way we act, think, and live.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Colossians: Against the Tide - Study 2

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

An Easy Life or a Great Life?

Success is not about living an easy life; it's about living a great life.

We all know there is a difference between wealth and success. Many people who are wealthy have made a disaster of their personal lives. There is also a difference between power and success. Think of all the 20th-century dictators who are now remembered only for the destruction they brought to those around them. One of the hallmarks of becoming a Christian is redefining what it means to be successful. This study will help you to do that.

Scripture:

Colossians 1:15–2:1

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

What is the mark of true success? More than just having or doing things, success can be defined as “living a great life.” It means living a life that makes a difference, that has a positive impact on those around you and continues to benefit others even generations after you’re gone. In that case, to be successful you don’t have to be a celebrity, and you don’t have to be rich, but there are three things you have to be willing to do. In the last few verses of Colossians 1, Paul discusses these three attitudes and how they drove him to be the person that he was. In these attitudes we see a blueprint for success. If you apply them to your job, ministry, marriage, children, dreams, goals, or anything else, you will be successful.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: To be successful you must be willing to suffer.

Teaching point two: To be successful, you must be willing to serve.

Teaching point three: To be successful, you must be willing to struggle.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Success is not about living an easy life; it’s about living a great life. You may be able to get through life without too much effort. You can coast through your job, your marriage, your commitment to your children, and never allow yourself to be inconvenienced. But if you want to succeed, it will require much more. You must be willing to suffer, you must be willing to serve, and you must be willing to struggle. That’s the difference between an easy life and a great life.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Colossians: Against the Tide - Study 3

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

A Stable Walk with God

We are saved by faith, and we live by faith.

If your Christian life resembles a roller-coaster ride, Colossians 2:2–7 can show you how to establish stability in your daily walk with Jesus. Paul uses four pivotal phrases that are crucial to living in Christ; these will help you develop consistency in your relationship with him. This study will look at each one.

Scripture:

Colossians 2:2–7

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Many Christians find themselves thinking, *This life is impossible! I can't do it!* They try to be obedient, they try to follow the rules, but it seems the more rules they follow, the more rules there are. Still, they roll up their shirtsleeves and give it the old college try, and maybe they succeed for a week or two. Then they bottom out, give in to temptation, get too busy to read their Bible, and become too disillusioned to pray. It isn't long before sin creeps back into their lives, and they are overcome with discouragement and flail around miserably for days, weeks, or months until they're able to muster the energy to try again.

The Book of Colossians teaches a completely different approach to Christian living—one that will revolutionize your walk with Christ when you begin to apply it to your life.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Live in Christ, rooted in him.

Teaching point two: Live in Christ, built up in him.

[Q] Which of the following things have most built up your faith in Jesus Christ?

- Reading the Bible
- Praying
- Fellowship with other Christians
- Other
- Attending church
- Attending a Bible study
- Meeting with an accountability partner

Teaching point three: Live in Christ, strengthened in the faith.

Teaching point four: Live in Christ, overflowing with thankfulness.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

There's only one way to become a rock-solid believer and to establish stability in your daily walk. You must do the same thing today that you did the day you were saved: put your faith entirely in Christ. Letting him become the root of your existence—centering your values and priorities around him—is an act of faith; trusting him to build you up is an act of faith; relying on his strength is an act of faith; thanking him in advance for finishing his work in you is an act of faith—and when you place your faith in him, he will not let you down.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Colossians: Against the Tide - Study 4

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Think Like a Christian

Everything we need we have in Christ.

Paul says in Colossians 2:8, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” He then goes on to outline a way of thinking about our relationship with God that is different from anything the world or any other religion teaches. In contrast to what “worldly philosophies” teach, Paul boldly states that everything we need we have in Christ. There are three things in particular that we will look at in this study.

Scripture:

Colossians 2:8–15

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Humanist philosophies teach that you only need yourself to achieve personal salvation; the Bible teaches that you cannot do it without Christ. Another way to say it is that humanist philosophies teach that people are basically good and sin is inconsequential. Anyone who has ever tried knows that we don't have it in ourselves to save ourselves; we need help. The Bible teaches that people aren't "basically good"—we have all sinned and fallen short of the mark (Romans 3:23). And though sin is not without consequences, God has provided a way of dealing with sin that destroys its stronghold on our lives once and for all.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: In Christ we have the fullness of God.

Teaching point two: In Christ we have forgiveness of sins.

[Q] Which of the following statements best represents what our attitude should be toward sin?

- I know I will sin, so I don't worry about it.
- I know I will sin, but I confess anything that I know is wrong.
- I know I will sin, and it always devastates me.
- I know that one day I will reach the point where I quit sinning.

Teaching point three: In Christ we have freedom from the law.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

In Christ we have everything we need—God's fullness, unconditional forgiveness, and total freedom. All the things that worldly philosophies try to promise, God has delivered. You don't have to pretend that sin doesn't exist. You don't have to try to talk yourself into not feeling guilty. You can acknowledge these things and turn them over to Christ, and he will forgive you—without fail. This gives you total freedom—not freedom to sin, but freedom to strive to become like Jesus.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Colossians: Against the Tide - Study 5

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Spiritual Self-Defense

Connect to Christ and allow him to become the focus of your existence.

When Paul wrote the Book of Colossians, he was giving first-century Christians a guide to living in a non-Christian culture. In our last study, we talked about how to think like a Christian, and Paul showed us that in Christ we have the fullness of God, forgiveness of sins, and freedom from the law. In this study, Paul gives us a course in spiritual self-defense; he shows us how to protect ourselves from thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes that put us at risk spiritually. This study covers three primary pitfalls to avoid.

Scripture:

Colossians 2:16–23

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

There are a number of conflicting opinions and beliefs in the area of religion and spirituality. Of course, everyone knows that various denominations believe different things—but for the most part, our different beliefs are insignificant. However, when you compare the beliefs of Christianity with those of other religions, you will see that the differences are major.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Don't get sideswiped.

Teaching point two: Don't get sidelined.

Teaching point three: Don't get sidetracked.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

This is how you protect yourself spiritually. You connect to Christ and allow him to become the focus of your existence. Living the Christian life is the process of growing closer to Christ. Don't let anything stand in the way of your relationship with Jesus. Don't get sideswiped; don't let people judge you—Christ is your judge. Don't get sidelined; don't allow yourself to stop growing as a Christian—our purpose is to serve Christ and glorify him. Don't get sidetracked; the Christian life is not about rules—it's about maintaining a relationship with Jesus. This is our best spiritual defense.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Colossians: Against the Tide - Study 6

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Living with a Focus

*To win the inner civil war, you have to set
your heart and mind on Christ.*

This study looks at three things that often stand in the way of our living a focused, Christ-centered life. If you're not careful, these three obstacles will disrupt your life, drive a wedge between your heart and your head, and prevent you from living a committed, focused Christian life. But Paul shows us how to overcome each one.

Scripture:

Colossians 3:1-11

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Paul tells us the solution to winning the inner civil war: Your head and heart have to be moving in the same direction. You have to set your heart and mind on Christ. You have to make sure that the things you say you want are really the things you want. And you have to be willing to back your words up with your actions.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Don't hang on to the past.

Teaching point two: Don't mix up your priorities.

Teaching point three: Don't underestimate the destructive power of sin.

[Q] Which of the following statements best reflects your attitude about sin?

- We all sin, so it's no big deal. God expects it of us.
- When I sin, I'm devastated. I spend weeks in mourning, hoping for God's forgiveness.
- When I sin, I repent, asking God to forgive me and change me.
- I confess most sins, but there are a few I refuse to confess because I don't want to change.

Which statement best represents what our attitude should be? How can we change our attitude to reflect that statement?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

This is the kind of life God desires for you. He wants you to be focused on him. He doesn't want any obstacle to stand in the way of your ability to ultimately appear with Christ in glory. Don't let the past, mixed-up priorities, or sin hold you back. Set your heart and mind on the things of God and experience the joy of a focused, Christ-centered life.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Colossians: Against the Tide - Study 7

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

When People Rub You the Wrong Way

God wants us to live together in unity.

This study will look at how to get along with difficult people. If you're on the receiving end of someone's cold shoulder, these principles will help you defuse difficult situations. And if you're on the giving end, we'll talk about how you can stop the cycle and make things right. God wants us to live together in unity; Colossians 3:12–17 shows us how.

Scripture:

Colossians 3:12–17

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Much of the Christian life comes down to how well we get along with other people. Scripture makes it plain that God places tremendous value on unity, which Paul stressed repeatedly throughout his letters. The ability to get along with others requires a great deal of effort. Our natural tendency is not to get along—even when things are going great.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Take the high road.

Teaching point two: Your actions are more important than your feelings.

[Q] Which of the following statements describe a healthy way to handle our feelings?

- If I'm upset, I try to pretend I'm really happy instead.
- If I'm upset, I try to show kindness anyway.
- If I'm upset, I let the person know it, but in a kind way.
- If I'm upset, I blow it out, but later apologize.
- If I'm upset, I become quiet and no one will ever know.

Teaching point three: Include Christ in every conversation.

Teaching point four: Pursue personal peace.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Getting along with others may not always be easy, but it's possible. It happens when you make an effort. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart, and you will be less likely to be rubbed the wrong way.

Of course, you still might rub them the wrong way—even without trying. When that happens, take the high road, remember that your actions are more important than your feelings, include Christ in every conversation, and let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Colossians: Against the Tide - Study 8

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

What You Do Comes Back to You

If you do right or wrong, you will be paid in kind.

The Bible teaches that what you do in this life comes back to you in this life—and the one to come.

If you do right, you will be paid for doing right; if you do wrong, you will be paid for doing wrong. If we believe this principle, and live accordingly, then our lives will reflect the results. In Colossians 3, Paul highlights three areas where we can see this principle at work in our lives. This study will take a closer look at each one.

Scripture:

Colossians 3:18–4:1

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Some people think the Bible teaches karma, but it doesn't. However, the belief in karma is basically a distortion of a biblical principle that we see taught throughout Scripture: What you do comes back to you. In other words, you reap in this life what you sow in this life. And it teaches that what you do comes back to you in eternity. In other words, you reap in eternity what you sow in this life.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: What you do comes back to you in your personal life.

Teaching point two: What you do comes back to you in your work life.

Teaching point three: What you do comes back to you in your spiritual life.

[Q] Explain what's wrong with each of the following statements.

- I do what I want, ask forgiveness, and deal with the consequences.
- It's hard for me to live for what will count in the next life, so I just concentrate on this life.
- I want to please God, but know I will fail, so I often don't try.
- I just do my best and hope it will all come out in the wash.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Depending on how you live, you may consider this principle a promise, or you may consider it a threat. If your life is devoted to doing good, you can rest in God's promise to reward you with an inheritance. On the other hand, if you are doing things that could come back to haunt you, then change your attitude. Stop doing what you're doing. Today, you can begin to make things right. What you do will come back to you; so today, if you begin to do right, God can begin to bless you. Don't let fear hold you back. Instead of thinking of this principle as a threat, see it for what God intends it to be: a promise of a good life on earth and an even better life to come. God wants to fill your life with good things. Make it possible for him to do that. Make a commitment to do good in every area of your life.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Colossians: Against the Tide - Study 9

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Become a Prayer Warrior

We need to develop a solid foundation of prayer.

Paul challenged the Colossian Christians to do three things regarding prayer: Make prayer a priority, look for things to pray about, and pray with a good attitude. This study will challenge you to do each of these things. Before we can begin to think about what we want to accomplish for the Lord, we need to develop a solid foundation of prayer.

Scripture:

Colossians 4:2-6

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

When Jesus first introduced the idea of the church to his disciples, he said the gates of hell would not overcome it (Matthew 16:18). Most interpret this verse to mean that the church will be strong enough to endure the attacks of the devil. But an army doesn't bring its gates into battle with it. It leaves its gates at home. Jesus is saying that the church isn't supposed to be on the defensive in the spiritual battles of life; we are to be on the offensive. We are to attack. We are to storm the gates of hell.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Pray that you will have opportunities for ministry.

Teaching point two: Pray that you will proclaim the message of Christ.

[Q] Which of the following statements would be a good response to someone who asks, "What does a Christian believe will get them to heaven?"

- You should go to church every Sunday.
- You should always take Communion.
- You should live by the Ten Commandments.
- You should confess your sins and ask Christ to forgive you.
- You should be kind to those around you.

Teaching point three: Pray that we will not let setbacks stand in our way.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Make prayer a greater priority in your life. Pray that you will have an open door for ministry to your community, that you will proclaim clearly the message of Christ, and that you will carry on regardless of what stands in your way. With prayer and God's help, we cannot fail.

—Study by Steve May, with JoHannah Reardon



