



**FLOURISH
BIBLE STUDY**

COLOSSIANS

FULLNESS OF LIFE IN CHRIST



LYDIA BROWBACK

Endorsements for the Flourish Bible Study Series

“The brilliant and beautiful mix of sound teaching, helpful charts, lists, sidebars, and appealing graphics—as well as insightful questions that get the reader into the text of Scripture—make these studies that women will want to invest time in and will look back on as time well spent.”

Nancy Guthrie, Bible teacher; author, *Even Better than Eden*

“My daughter and I love using Flourish Bible Studies for our morning devotions. Lydia Brownback’s faithful probing of biblical texts; insightful questions; invitations to engage in personal applications using additional biblical texts and historical contexts; and commitment to upholding the whole counsel of God as it bears on living life as a godly woman have drawn us closer to the Lord and to his word. Brownback never sidesteps hard questions or hard providences, but neither does she appeal to discourses of victimhood or therapy, which are painfully common in the genre of women’s Bible studies. I cannot recommend this series highly enough. My daughter and I look forward to working through this whole series together!”

Rosaria Butterfield, Former Professor of English, Syracuse University; author, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*

“As a women’s ministry leader, I am excited about the development of the Flourish Bible Study series, which will not only prayerfully equip women to increase in biblical literacy but also come alongside them to build a systematic and comprehensive framework to become lifelong students of the word of God. This series provides visually engaging studies with accessible content that will not only strengthen the believer but the church as well.”

Karen Hodge, Coordinator of Women’s Ministries, Presbyterian Church in America; coauthor, *Transformed*

“Lydia Brownback is an experienced Bible teacher who has dedicated her life to ministry roles that help women (and men) grow in Christ. With a wealth of biblical, historical, and theological content, her Flourish Bible Studies are ideal for groups and individuals that are serious about the in-depth study of the word of God.”

Phil and Lisa Ryken, President, Wheaton College; and his wife, Lisa

“If you’re looking for rich, accessible, and deeply biblical Bible studies, this series is for you! Lydia Brownback leads her readers through different books of the Bible, providing background information, maps, timelines, and questions that probe the text in order to glean understanding and application. She settles us deeply in the context of a book as she highlights God’s unfolding plan of redemption and rescue. You will learn, you will delight in God’s word, and you will love our good King Jesus even more.”

Courtney Doctor, Coordinator of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition; author, *From Garden to Glory* and *Steadfast*

“Lydia Brownback’s Bible study series provides a faithful guide to book after book. You’ll find rich insights into context and good questions to help you study and interpret the Bible. Page by page, the studies point you to respond to each passage and to love our great and gracious God. I will recommend the Flourish series for years to come for those looking for a wise, Christ-centered study that leads toward the goal of being transformed by the word.”

Taylor Turkington, Bible teacher; Director, BibleEquipping.org

“Lydia Brownback has a contagious love for the Bible. Not only is she fluent in the best of biblical scholarship in the last generation, but her writing is accessible to the simplest of readers. She has the rare ability of being clear without being reductionistic. I anticipate many women indeed will flourish through her trustworthy guidance in this series.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, desiringGod.org; Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace*

COLOSSIANS



Flourish Bible Study Series

By Lydia Brownback

Judges: The Path from Chaos to Kingship

Esther: The Hidden Hand of God

Job: Trusting God When Suffering Comes

Jonah: God's Relentless Grace

Habakkuk: Learning to Live by Faith

Luke: Good News of Great Joy

Ephesians: Growing in Christ

Philippians: Living for Christ

Colossians: Fullness of Life in Christ

James: Walking in Wisdom

1–2 Peter: Living Hope in a Hard World



**FLOURISH
BIBLE STUDY**

COLOSSIANS

FULLNESS OF LIFE IN CHRIST

LYDIA BROWNBACK

■ ■ CROSSWAY®
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Colossians: Fullness of Life in Christ

© 2024 by Lydia Brownback

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design: Crystal Courtney

First printing 2024

Printed in China

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated into any other language.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-8327-8

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

RRDS 33 32 31 30 29 28 27 26 25 24
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

With gratitude to God
for
Lauren Whalen,
the daughter I've always wanted
but never thought I'd have.

“He is before all things, and in him
all things hold together.” —Colossians 1:17

CONTENTS

The Timing of Colossians.....	x
Introduction: Getting into Colossians.....	xiii
Reading Plan.....	xvii
Week 1 Greetings and Gratitude (Colossians 1:1–8).....	1
Week 2 The Absolute Best Way to Pray (Colossians 1:9–14).....	9
Week 3 Lord of All! (Colossians 1:15–23).....	17
Week 4 Mystery Made Known (Colossians 1:24–29).....	27
Week 5 Christ Our Treasure (Colossians 2:1–15).....	37
Week 6 Christ Is Sufficient—Really and Truly (Colossians 2:16–23).....	45
Week 7 Clothed in Christ (Colossians 3:1–17).....	53
Week 8 Whatever You Do . . . (Colossians 3:18–4:1).....	61
Week 9 Wise Walking (Colossians 4:2–6).....	69
Week 10 Living in Christ Grows Love in Christ (Colossians 4:7–18).....	75
Helpful Resources for Studying Colossians.....	83
Notes.....	85

INTRODUCTION

GETTING INTO COLOSSIANS

Jesus Christ is everything—there’s no better way to describe the heart of this New Testament epistle, Colossians. Its message is a breath of fresh spiritual air in our sin-saturated, self-oriented age that seeks to diminish Christ or do away with him altogether. Today, even within some of our churches, Christ is sidelined, held up as nothing more than an example of a good guy on whom we can model our lives and loves. Colossians keeps us from being tricked into believing that Christ isn’t sufficient for salvation. It guards us against messages claiming that what’s needed is Christ plus our own best efforts, or Christ plus modern science, or Christ plus politics. The apostle Paul wrote this letter because lies about the gospel were poisoning the church at Colossae, and he was passionate to remind the believers there that the one true gospel was all they needed for, well, everything. The reminder he gave them is also for us, and how very much we need it! Whenever we hear that Jesus isn’t enough for us—and we hear it all the time now—encouragement is there for us in this letter written to help our ancient brothers and sisters in Colossae. God’s word to them is also his word to us.



WHO’S WHO IN COLOSSIANS

The overarching figure in Colossians is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is exalted here, held up in all his excellence and glory, perhaps more than in any New Testament letter. Also prominent is the apostle Paul, who, as the author of the letter, leads us into deeper understanding of Christ and what it means to live the Christian life. We also find mention of Paul’s ministry partners, including Timothy, Epaphras, and Onesimus. We must also include here the recipients of the letter—believers in Colossae and its neighboring city Laodicea.



SETTING

Paul probably wrote the letter in AD 62 from Rome, where he was in prison because of his faith. Most likely he’d never met the believers in

Colossae. The church there had been planted some years earlier while Paul was doing ministry in Ephesus. Historians believe that during those years, a man named Epaphras traveled from Colossae, his hometown, and became a believer through Paul's teaching. Afterward, Epaphras went home to Colossae, where he shared his newfound faith and planted the Colossian church. Epaphras stayed integrally connected to Paul, and it was through this connection that Paul found out how the Colossian church was being corrupted, stirring him to address the situation and encourage the Colossian believers to hold fast to the true gospel. Most likely Paul dictated the letter to Timothy, and then his ministry partners Tychicus and Onesimus carried the letter to Colossae on Paul's behalf.



THEMES

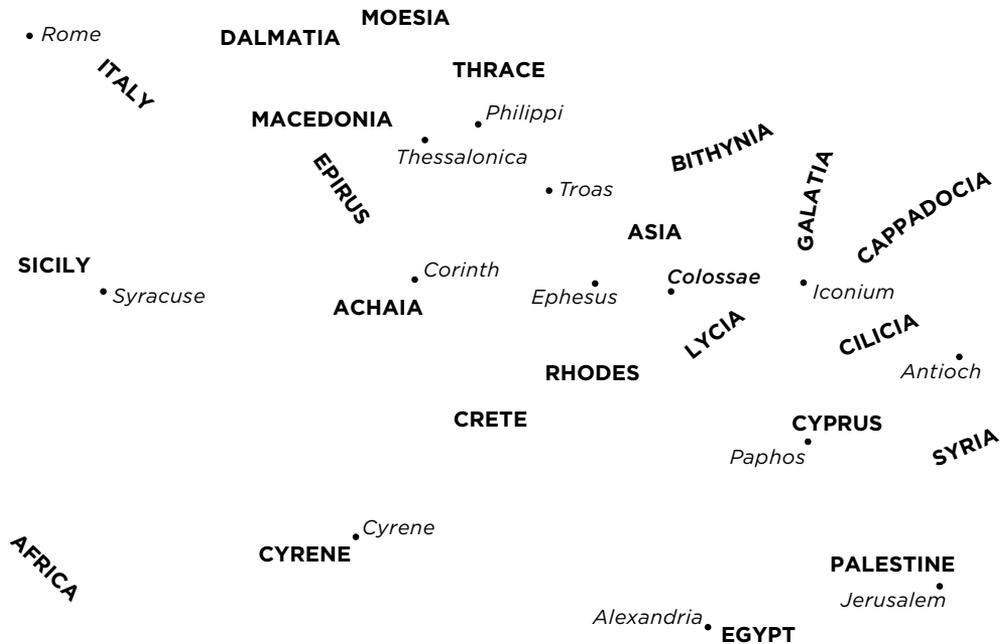
The overarching theme of Colossians is that Christ is Lord of everything and everyone. God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile all who put their faith in him, and those redeemed by Christ are taken spiritually into his death and resurrection, and then live their lives in and through him. The letter also shows us how the gospel was revealed over time, how it unfolded and eventually came to light in all its fullness. Now that salvation through Christ is fully known, believers can live out these spiritual realities in their day-to-day lives, growing up in their faith and sharing the wonders of salvation with a watching world.

Pronunciation Guide

Colossae	coll-AH-see	Laodicea	LAY-oh-diss-EE-ah
Epaphras	eh-PAPH-russ	Hierapolis	hire-OP-olis
asceticism	ah-SET-ah-cism	Demas	DEE-muss
Scythian	SITH-ee-an	Archippus	are-KIPP-iss
Tychicus	TICK-a-kiss	Onesimus	oh-NESS-a-miss
Aristarchus	heiress-TARK-iss		



The Setting of Colossians (c. AD 62)¹



STUDYING COLOSSIANS



At the beginning of each week's lesson, read the entire passage. And then read it again. If you are studying Colossians with a group, read it once more, aloud, when you gather to discuss the lesson. Marinating in the Scripture text is the most important part of any Bible study.



GROUP STUDY

If you are doing this study as part of a group, you'll want to finish each week's lesson before the group meeting. You can work your way through the study questions all in one sitting or by doing a little bit each day. And don't be discouraged if you don't have sufficient time to answer every question. Just do as much as you can, knowing that the more you do, the more you'll learn. No matter how much of the study you are able to complete each week, the group will benefit simply from your presence,

so don't skip the gathering if you can't finish! That being said, group time will be most rewarding for every participant if you have done the lesson in advance.

If you are leading the group, you can download the free leader's guide at <https://www.lydiabrownback.com/flourish-series>.

Marinating in the Scripture text is the most important part of any Bible study.



INDIVIDUAL STUDY

The study is designed to run for ten weeks, but you can set your own pace if you're studying solo. And you can download the free leader's guide (<https://www.lydiabrownback.com/flourish-series>) if you'd like some guidance along the way.

**Reading Plan**

	Primary Text	Supplemental Reading
Week 1	Colossians 1:1-8	Acts 9:3-19
Week 2	Colossians 1:9-14	
Week 3	Colossians 1:15-23	Proverbs 8:22-31
Week 4	Colossians 1:24-29	Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:7-9
Week 5	Colossians 2:1-15	Proverbs 2:3-5; Romans 2:25-29
Week 6	Colossians 2:16-23	
Week 7	Colossians 3:1-17	
Week 8	Colossians 3:18-4:1	Philemon 1-25
Week 9	Colossians 4:2-6	
Week 10	Colossians 4:7-18	Revelation 3:14-19





WEEK 1

GREETINGS AND GRATITUDE

COLOSSIANS 1:1-8

Wouldn't you agree that there's always a bit of anticipation in going to the mailbox to get the daily delivery? You never know when you might discover a personalized letter or a greeting card hiding among all the junk mail and bills. Sometimes, though, the greetings aren't really all that personal but just pretend to be—like those holiday cards from your lawn-care service or local politician. Since the senders don't really know us, the greetings they convey ring hollow. The apostle Paul didn't know many of the believers at Colossae, but his letter is deeply personal even so. From the very start, we pick up on his genuinely warm tone. It's clear he's writing to those he considers true friends. How revealing this is about the bond of true faith! In union with Christ, believers are not only friends but also family—the sort of bond that's typically unhindered by time and geographical distance. Paul's heart is filled with gratitude and genuine love for the Colossian Christians, and this week we find out why.

1. GRACE-FILLED GREETINGS (1:1-2)

Paul begins Colossians as he does most of his letters, identifying both the senders and the recipients, and expressing his desire that those to whom he is writing will experience God's grace and peace, the blessings of his unearned favor:

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace
from God our Father.” (vv. 1–2)

- ✝ Before getting into the substance of the letter, Paul gives his credentials. He was an apostle, one of the spiritual leaders of the early Christian church. Read Acts 9:3–19, the story of Paul’s conversion (he was known as Saul at the time). What in this story explains why Paul attributes his call as an apostle to God’s will?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Apostles

The apostles were men specifically chosen by Christ and given authority to establish and lead the early church. Each apostle had seen the risen Christ firsthand. There are no apostles today.



- ✝ What do you think Paul was communicating to the recipients of the letter by sharing his credentials?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Paul includes Timothy in his greeting. It’s possible that Timothy served as Paul’s secretary for this letter, writing down the words Paul dictated to him. We don’t know for sure the role Timothy played in writing the letter, but we do know that he was a vital partner in Paul’s ministry. He traveled with Paul on missions trips (Acts 16:1–20:4), and on at least one occasion he served as Paul’s spokesman (1 Corinthians 4:15–17). He also preached alongside Paul (2 Corinthians 1:19).

✦ What do we learn from Paul’s greeting about how he views the believers at Colossae?

.....

.....

.....

.....

When Paul describes the Colossian believers as “saints,” he’s not saying that they had achieved a super-high level of spiritual maturity. In reality, all who belong to Christ by faith, no matter their level of growth, are saints. They are “set apart” ones, chosen by God for salvation.

2. GRATITUDE FOR GOD’S GRACE (1:3–6)

Paul begins, as he so often does in his letters, with gratitude. His words of thanksgiving aren’t a mere formality, but a reminder that God is the source—the very reason—for the Colossians’ salvation and all the blessings that come along with it:

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth. (vv. 3–6)

✦ As Christians, we also thank God for our many blessings. Do you offer regular thanks for the things Paul expresses here? For what do you most frequently give thanks to God?

.....

.....

.....

.....

✝ What two qualities does Paul attribute to the Colossian believers in verse 4?

1.

2.

Paul roots these two qualities in hope, specifically the hope laid up for believers in heaven (v. 5). The sort of hope Paul has in mind here isn't primarily an emotion or a sense of well-being. The hope he is writing about is an actual reality, all the blessings of salvation that begin in this lifetime but won't be fully known and experienced until we are home in heaven for eternity.

✝ Colossians is not the only letter in which the apostle Paul links faith, love, and hope. What does each of the following passages add to our understanding about how faith, love, and hope work together?

• 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

.....

.....

.....

• Galatians 5:5–6

.....

.....

.....

• Ephesians 4:1–6

.....

.....

.....

• 1 Thessalonians 5:8

.....

.....

.....

The hope laid up in heaven is a vital aspect of “the word of the truth” (v. 5), which is the gospel. The word *gospel* means “good news,” and in the Bible, the good news—the gospel—is that sinners are saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this good news is not a secret, revealed to only a select few. At the time Colossians was written, the gospel had already spread to places like Syria, Greece, Italy, North Africa, and beyond, which is what Paul means by “the whole world” in verse 6.

Paul says that the gospel is “bearing fruit” (v. 6). The metaphor of fruit bearing goes all the way back to the beginning, to the time of creation, when God told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). What began then as *biological* fruit bearing—generations of children and grandchildren growing over time into a great nation—eventually expanded into *spiritual* fruit bearing, growing God’s family by means of salvation in Jesus.

✦ The fruit bearing Paul has in mind in verse 6 isn’t just about outsiders coming into God’s family; it’s also about an ongoing process in believers’ lives. How do Jesus’s words in John 15:1–5 show us how this fruit bearing happens?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Salvation is by grace alone—*that* is the gospel truth, contrary to what false teachers were trying to spread around the church at Colossae. Paul reassures the Colossians that they have understood the gospel correctly, calling it “the grace of God in truth” (v. 6). God’s grace is his determination to save and bless undeserving sinners. No one deserves God’s favor; in fact, each one of us deserves the opposite—God’s wrath. So without grace, there would be no gospel, no good news.

- ✦ In another one of his letters, Paul goes into a bit more detail about the grace that undergirds the gospel. How does Ephesians 2:1–9 deepen your understanding of gospel grace?

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. GRATITUDE FOR GOSPEL GROWTH (1:7–8)

We discover in verse 7 that the Colossians learned the gospel from Paul’s friend and ministry associate Epaphras, a shortened form of the name Epaphroditus. Epaphras was himself a Colossian.

“ . . . just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.” (vv. 7–8)

- ✦ What do we learn about Epaphras’s relationship with the Colossian believers in verses 7 and 8?

.....

.....

.....

.....

- ✦ Twice in the first eight verses of this letter Paul notes the Colossians’ love. In verse 4, he comments on the love they have for other believers, and here in verse 8, he references their “love in the Spirit.” How do 2 Corinthians 13:14 and Philippians 2:1 shed light on what Paul means by “love in the Spirit”?

.....

.....



LET'S TALK

1. Paul was characterized by gratitude. He expresses thanks for the faith, love, and hope of fellow believers, for the spread of the gospel, and for his partners in ministry. Expressing gratitude to God for all our blessings is, of course, good and right, but Paul shows us that genuine godly gratitude extends beyond our personal blessings. Discuss what makes you thankful. Do your reasons for gratitude align with Paul's?

2. Review how Paul weaves faith, love, and hope together in Colossians 1:3–6. How has hope impacted your faith and your ability to love others? Include in your discussion the other end of the spectrum, hopelessness. If you've experienced a season of hopelessness, what impact has that had on your faith and relationships? What does Paul say in this passage that can restore lost hope?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....