



FIRST

December 2018 – December 2020

Bible Study Introduction

**Christ Is
First in
Colossians**

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Christians love to talk about the gospel. But what exactly is it? The gospel literally means “good news.” So, when Christians use the phrase “the gospel,” they’re talking about the good news of God redeeming all of humankind to Jesus. In recent years, it’s become somewhat of a trend to be “gospel-centered” and to make the gospel visible in everything. As a result, there is gospel-centered ministry, gospel-centered parenting, and even gospel-centered fitness. We should rejoice at this desire to put the good news at the center of everything. This is why Scripture tells us that the gospel is of “first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3).

But when was the last time we stopped to remind ourselves why the gospel is of first importance?

The gospel is a message of first importance because it’s about a person of greatest importance—Jesus Christ. You see, Jesus Christ is the very Son of God. Christ is the supreme Creator. Yet, he is also the glory of God in human form. So, the reason why the news of the gospel is good and of first importance is because Christ is good and first above all things. The supremacy of the gospel flows directly from the supremacy of Christ because Jesus Christ is the gospel, our good news. As John Piper says, “If the glory of God in Christ were not given to us in the gospel for our everlasting seeing and savoring, the gospel would not be good news.” (John Piper, *God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God’s Love as the Gift of Himself* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 73.)

In this study, we invite you to ponder the preeminence of Christ in Colossians. Preeminent simply means first above all else. And, as we behold the One who is more glorious than anything else in the universe, our prayer is that we all might be transformed. Colossians exalts Christ with sentences like this one:

And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent (Colossians 1:17–18 ESV).

Christ is preeminent, supreme, and first above all. That is the reason why this study is entitled Christ Is First.

Alienated and Hostile

Although the message of Christianity proclaims that Christ is first above all things, there is a massive obstacle that prevents Christ's preeminence from impacting the rest of our everyday lives—sin.

At its basic root, sin “is any feeling or thought or action that comes from a heart that does not treasure God over all other things. The bottom of sin, the root of all sins, is such a heart—a heart that prefers anything above God; a heart that doesn't treasure God over everything else, and everyone else.” (John Piper, *Living in the Light: Money, Sex, and Power* (Nørhaven, Denmark: The Good Book Company, 2016), 25–26.)

Sadly, no one in the universe gives Christ the honor he is due. Even though he is the preeminent Creator, we have all chosen to worship and serve “the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). Colossians teaches us that without Christ we are “alienated and hostile in our minds” (1:21). Not only our minds but our lives are devoted to evil deeds (1:21).

This idolatry is not only foolish, but it invites God's just judgment on us. We are guilty of personally affronting the most powerful and worthy person in the universe, and because of this, the “wrath of God is coming” (Colossians 3:6). In addition to being guilty, we have completely submitted ourselves to the “domain of darkness” (1:13). We are powerless to free ourselves from this voluntary slavery to sin, which is why we are in such desperate need of the gospel.

As you walk through this study, we hope you will clearly see the heinousness of sin. We want you to detest sin's wretchedness and darkness. The key to seeing the world—and our sin—

clearly comes from the light of the redemption we've been given in our God, Jesus Christ, who is supreme and first above all things.

The Supreme One Suffered

The good news is that the Father did not abandon us in our guilty and helpless state! God “delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (1:13). In Christ, God granted us “the forgiveness of sins” (1:14). How did this happen? It happened through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the Son of God.

All of us deserve God's wrath because we rejected his worth. After living a perfect life, free from sin, Jesus died an excruciating death on a cross, receiving the death that we deserved for our sins and absorbing God's wrath. Consider the seriousness of your sin by pondering what Christ had to do in order to save us. Christ the Creator was crucified. The preeminent One was persecuted. The supreme God-man suffered. The King of Glory was crushed. It took the death of Jesus, the one and only Son of God, to cancel the debt of our sin.

Ultimately, not even death itself could defeat Christ. The Father raised Christ from the dead by his Spirit and seated Christ at his right hand (3:1). Through his death and resurrection, Christ redeems and reconciles hostile sinners to himself. This is our good news, the gospel! We pray this study leads you to rehearse and proclaim this truth regularly, to yourself and to others.

Walking in Christ

Not only are we forgiven of our sins through Christ but we are called to walk in him (2:6). This doesn't come naturally, but in Christ, we are given power to resist sin and put him first in our lives. Christ absorbs our penalty for sin and provides us with freedom from sin's dominating power. Believers, this is good news! Because of Christ, we can overcome sin (2:20; 3:5) and

walk in a manner worthy of Christ (1:10; 2:6).

As you go through this study, we hope that these truths will transform your heart. The idols that threaten Christ's supremacy in your heart are powerful, but they are no match for the power of Christ.

The Glories of Christ in Colossians

As you begin this study, take a few moments to simply ponder the glories of Christ found in the book of Colossians. Return to this list regularly to meditate on him. As you put your mind on Christ first, may he become first in all your life.

- Jesus Christ is Lord and King (1:3, 13).
- In Christ, we are delivered from the domain of darkness (1:13).
- Christ redeems us through the forgiveness of sins (1:14).
- Christ is the image of the invisible God (1:15).
- Christ is the firstborn of all creation (1:15).
- All things were created by Christ, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible (1:16).
- All things were created not just by Christ but for him (1:16).
- Christ is before all things (1:17).
- All things hold together in Christ (1:17).
- Christ is the head of the body, the church (1:18).
- Christ is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead (1:18).
- Christ himself has first place in everything (1:18).
- God's fullness dwells in Christ (1:19).
- Through Christ, all things are reconciled to God (1:20).
- Christ's blood makes peace between God and man, who were hostile enemies (1:20–21).

- Through Christ, we can be presented as holy, blameless, and beyond reproach (1:22).
- Christ is the hope of glory (1:27).
- Christ's power mightily works within us, energizing our labor in proclaiming him (1:28–29).
- In Christ, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (2:3).
- In Christ, all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form (2:9).
- In Christ, we are made complete (2:10).
- Christ is the head over all rule and authority (2:10).
- In Christ, we receive new life through union with him (2:11–12).
- Christ's death cancels all debts and decrees that rightfully cried out against us (2:14).
- Christ disarms and triumphs over all the rulers and authorities (2:15).
- Through Christ, we have died and been raised to new life (2:20; 3:1).
- Our life is hidden with Christ in God, and he is our life (3:3–4).
- Christ is the one who will be revealed in glory and us with him (3:4).
- It is according to Christ that our new self is being renewed (3:10).
- It is Christ's Word that enriches our teaching, admonishing, and singing (3:16).
- It is for Christ we work heartily, not for men (3:23).
- It is Christ who will give us the reward of the inheritance (3:24).
- Christ is the heavenly Master of every person (4:1).

Bible Study Introduction

**How to Use
This Guide**

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This booklet will serve as your personal guide through a small group study of Colossians and the FIRST sermon series. Through this guide, we will examine how Christ should be first in the lives of all believers. More specifically, we will consider how we can put Jesus first in the ways we steward our time, talent, and treasure as expressions of our devotion to him.

This guide contains several components to help us meet these goals:

Study Guide

Each weekly study includes a devotional introduction to focus your heart and mind. Then, the small group study guide incorporates a series of questions for personal study and group discussion based on the H.E.A.R. method of Bible study:

- **Highlight:** Read and observe everything in the passage.
- **Examine:** Based on your reading, discover what the passage means in its context.
- **Apply:** Understand how the meaning of the passage affects your lives.
- **Respond to God in Prayer:** Pray God's word back to him, asking to believe, share, and put the Bible into practice in your lives and relationships.

Work on these exercises at any time throughout the week, but please do so in advance of your small group meeting.

Additionally, we invite you to read through all of Colossians at least once each week—don't fret, it's a quick read! Some might even choose to listen to the entire book each week, which takes about 22 minutes. Visit esv.org/colossians or use your favorite Bible app.

Several of the questions in this section are based on an excellent Bible study of Colossians written by Summit's own Michal Rudolph and Allyson Hartley, entitled Filled. It is a great re-

source for anyone who wants to do a more thorough study through every passage in Colossians. To download a copy of Filled, check out our list of companion resources at summitrdu.com/colossians.

Next Steps in Stewardship

Our prayer is that 100 percent of our church will put Jesus first in their lives. In this season, we believe it's important for all of us to give time and space to meet with God and ask him what it looks like to put Jesus first. Each weekly study ends with next steps for becoming more generous with our time, talent, and treasure. These challenges will help us see how the lordship of Jesus as first over all creation intersects with our everyday lives. Complete this section after you discuss the study guide with your small group.

Remember, this study seeks to help us encounter God through his Word and then respond with faith and obedience in tangible ways. Let's make the most of this opportunity to focus on Jesus, first and foremost. Some of us might need a reset with God, others might need to renew a relationship with Jesus, and some might be encountering God for the very first time. Wherever we may be, Jesus is first over all creation, so let's make him first over everything in our lives.

Week One

Christ Is First

Colossians 1:15–23

Key Verses

“... that in everything he might be preeminent.” - Colossians 1:18

First Principles

- Jesus is preeminent because he came before us, helped to create us, and reigns over all the universe with supreme authority.
- Jesus did not shrink back or withhold from us, but he gave his all so that we could be part of God’s family.
- When we take on the name of Jesus Christ as Christians, we are saying, in essence, that Jesus is preeminent in our lives.
- Christ becomes first in our lives when we realize that he is a greater treasure than anything else this world has to offer.

Read

In Colossians 1, Paul prays for Christians to understand the gospel (vv. 3–6, 9, 13–14), be strengthened by God (v. 11), and to live our lives “in a manner worthy of the Lord” (v. 10). Verse 15 teaches us what it is about our Lord, Jesus Christ, that demands that we live up to the standards he has set for us. In a word, Christ is worthy of our whole life and devotion because he is preeminent.

Preeminent is not a word that we use often, so let’s take a minute to clarify what it means. The

Greek word behind it means to hold the highest rank or to have first place. Synonyms in English include supreme, best, or foremost. In short, preeminent means Christ is first above all.

Colossians 1:15–23 describes Jesus in the most superlative terms ever penned about a person. Christ isn't just a man, he is the Son of God! He was present with God the Father at creation, and he helped set it in motion. Not only that but he continually sustains the universe with his power. There isn't a single authority, force, or power greater than that of Jesus Christ. Jesus perfectly reflects God's glory, and he was filled by God as he walked among us on earth.

Jesus is preeminent because he came before us, helped to create us, and reigns over all the universe with supreme authority.

Jesus' absolute greatness and unmatched glory makes the next part of the gospel story so astounding. Sin and death enter the world in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve rebel against God the Father and impart indwelling sin to all of humankind. As a result, we were all separated from God because of our sin (Colossians 1:21), and Jesus gave up his power and glory so that he could reconcile us to God and to each other. Part of Jesus' preeminence is that he is the only person in the universe who had the power and authority to reconcile all things to God. Jesus did not shrink back or withhold from us, but he gave his all so that we could be part of God's family. This is true power and the truest love: to give up one's life for the redemption of another. And that love draws us in and calls us beloved sons and daughters as we take on the name of Christ.

When we take on the name of Jesus Christ as Christians, we are saying, in essence, that Jesus is preeminent over every area our lives. Jesus deserves to be first above all things because he has done—and continues to do—what no one else could ever do. He died for us, even though we were evil and hostile to God. His sacrifice is producing a miraculous change in us, from wretched sinners to “holy and blameless” (1:22). Because he reached out to us first, before we knew how lost we were and how much we needed his redemption, we

respond to his love by making him preeminent, first above all, in our lives.

Christ becomes first in our lives when we realize that he is a greater treasure than anything else this world has to offer. And when Christ becomes our greatest treasure, we can't help but steward our giftings in such a way that points to his preeminence in this world and in our lives. Over the next four weeks, it is our hope that our study together in Colossians will walk through what it means to live with Christ as preeminent, as first above all.

Study Guide

The following exercises and study questions are meant to help us see how Christ should be first in the lives of all believers. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.

Sermon Follow-up Question



Read (or listen to) all of Colossians at some point this week. Then, return to Colossians 1:15–23 as the focus for this week's study.

Highlight

1) The first chapter in several New Testament books is devoted to giving an introduction to who Jesus is. Like Colossians 1:15–23, the picture of Jesus Christ that we get from these passages is glorious. As part of our study this week, make a list of the glorious aspects of Jesus that emerge from reading the following passages: Colossians 1, John 1, Ephesians 1, Hebrews 1, and Revelation 1. Take a look at some of our suggestions, then add your own glorious descriptions of Jesus in the spaces provided.

- Jesus is our Redeemer (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14).
- Jesus blessed us with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3).

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With your small group, take a few minutes to share some observations that you made about Jesus from your study of Colossians 1, John 1, Ephesians 1, Hebrews 1, and Revelation 1. According to these New Testament writers, why is Christ worthy of our praise? Talk about these specific attributes and accomplishments.

2) Take note of each time you see the word “all” in Colossians 1:15–23. What is it describing? What other words in this passage have a similar connotation? (If you need a hint, read the next question.)

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Respond in Prayer

- Praise Christ in prayer for who he is and the work he has done (1:15–20).
- Spend some time confessing to God your hostility towards his supremacy in your life (1:21), and thank him for reconciling you to himself (1:22).
- Ask God to give you strength to “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel” (1:23).



Prayer Journal

As we are asking God what it looks like to put Jesus first in our lives, keep a prayer journal with others in your family or small group. This journal can be in a physical notebook or in a digital format. Some may even consider keeping a physical notebook at small group to collect prayer requests and write down answers to prayer. Start the journal with week one, but set aside a few minutes in your small group meeting to update the journal each week.

Next Steps in Stewardship

The following exercises and questions are opportunities for all of us and our small groups to apply what we're learning in real, tangible ways. Complete this section after you discuss the study guide with your small group. Our prayer is that 100 percent of our church will put Jesus first in their lives. In this season, we believe it's important for all of us to ask God what it looks like to put Jesus first in our time, our talent, and our treasure. Consider these practical next steps to grow in stewardship of your time, talent, and treasure.

Is Christ First in Our Lives?

We learned this week that Christ becomes first in our lives when we realize that he is a greater treasure than anything else this world has to offer. It can be easy to proclaim with our lips that Christ is first above all, but the real question remains: Do we also proclaim Christ as first above all in our daily lives? Here are a few questions that will help you measure and grow in making Christ preeminent in your daily life:

1) What are the top five areas in your life where you spend most of your time?

2) List your top five greatest strengths and abilities (your talent). Where (or for whom) are you applying these talents?

3) In what five areas do you spend the majority of your finances (your treasure)?

Reflect on your answers. Do your choices display a life committed to putting Christ first in your use of time, talent, and treasure?

What is the Spirit of God leading you to change so that Christ might be more exalted with how you steward your time, talent, and treasure?

Invite at least one Christian friend into this conversation with you. What feedback did they offer regarding how you spend your time, talent, and treasure? Allow them to help you hear from God on this.

Practical Step: Stewarding Our Time, Talent, and Treasure

Some of us might be overwhelmed at this point. You might know that there are some things you need to change but don't know where to start. Hang in there! The good news is that we weren't made to do this alone. God's "Plan A" for changing the world is the church, his people. A great first step in stewarding our time, talent, and treasure is to join a church family through membership. At the Summit, we invite you to join us for Starting Point.

Starting Point is an informal introduction to The Summit Church. At **Starting Point**, you'll meet other members, hear about the history and vision of our church, and have an opportunity to respond with next steps, such as baptism, membership, serving in a ministry, or joining a small group. If you have never been baptized or joined a church before, we want to help you see God's design for all of us to respond to the gospel with these actions. Wherever you are, we would love to walk beside you in your pursuit of making Christ first above all in your life, so please join us for Starting Point at any Summit campus. For more information, go to summitrdu.com/startingpoint.

If you're already a member and have been baptized, inviting fellow believers into your life to walk with you in your pursuit of making Christ first above all is critical. **This week, set aside time to call or grab coffee with a fellow church member and talk about ways you want to see Christ as Lord of all.** Specifically, ask your Christians friends if they see any ways you can better steward your time, talent, and treasure for the sake of the gospel.

Week Two

Responding to Christ's Sacrifice

Colossians 1:24–2:5

Key Verses

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” - Colossians 1:28–29

First Principles

- Paul found joy in the preeminence of Christ and in sacrificing whatever he could to advance the ministry of the gospel.
- God has called us to be a part of his glorious work and each of us have different gifts that we are called to steward joyfully.

Read

Colossians 1:24 begins with a statement from Paul saying that he rejoices in his sufferings. Think about how peculiar that sounds. What could possibly possess a man to say that he rejoices in his sufferings?! As we dive into this passage together, we'll see that Paul's joy was found in Christ alone and not in his circumstances, no matter how dark or painful they may have been. Paul found joy in the preeminence of Christ and in sacrificing whatever he could to advance the ministry of the gospel.

This week's study will invite us to find joy in the same things!

In week one, we saw that Jesus sacrificed himself so that we could have eternal life in relationship with God. Paul responded to Jesus' sacrifice by following him, even if it meant suf-

fering, imprisonment, and great struggle (2:1). His passion was to see the church grow into maturity, and he recognized that there was still work to be done for the world to know the gospel. So, he willingly subjected himself to unpleasant circumstances in order to advance the good news of the gospel to people who have not heard.

What's amazing is that Paul actually found joy in this decision (1:24)! Paul knew that the road was going to be painful. Yet, Paul's desire to glorify God and give others the immense hope that comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ allowed him to endure his sufferings with joy. He had a vision for how the gospel was bearing fruit and spreading in the world (1:5–6). Thus, the work that he put into his role in spreading the gospel was an utterly joyful endeavor.

Don't we all want to be a part of something so meaningful that we can rejoice in the suffering that comes along with the work? Where sacrifices produce joy? Where we give up things close to us with smiles on our faces, for the sake of something greater?

The truth is, many of us already do this in different areas of our lives. Think about the many nurses and firefighters who put the greater good of others above themselves. Many of them work long shifts and sleep at work during storms, all the while serving others with smiles on their faces. Picture the sacrifice of a mother whose body is stretched to its limit through pregnancy and childbirth. The sacrifice of pregnancy and childbirth ultimately produces a beautiful baby. Think about marathon runners who train their bodies day after day and push through pain with the vision of the finish line on their mind. These are everyday people, just like us. And the good news is that, regardless of our jobs, relationship status, or athletic ability, God has called us to be a part of his glorious work, and each of us have different gifts that we are called to steward joyfully. Like Paul, each of us can follow Jesus and make disciples of all nations. We can live with the end in mind!

Notice that Paul calls his ministry a stewardship (1:25). Paul believes that gospel ministry is what God has given to him to do with his life (1:25; 4:17). In 4:5, we see that Paul believes our time on earth is short, and it is imperative for all of us to make the best use of the time we

have left. It is clear from his writings that Paul believes that his ministry is given to him by God, and Paul joyfully performs this ministry in response to Christ's sacrifice. Throughout this four-week study, we hope you meditate on the glories of Christ, and in response to his sacrifice and love, may you steward your life in ways that build Christ's kingdom, just like Paul.

Interestingly, Paul claims to be completing what is unfinished regarding Christ's afflictions. What he means by this is that the work of Christ to redeem us is finished, but the effort necessary to build up the church and spread the gospel is not finished. For Paul, he was desperate to see the gospel spread and bear fruit throughout the world. He understood that he was an active participant in God's great plan to save humanity.

Paul uses the word "mystery" to describe the gospel. This mystery, which was once hidden for ages, is now revealed (1:26). It might sound like an odd way to talk about the gospel, but Paul is referencing predictions made by Daniel in the Old Testament (Daniel 2:17–30, 47). Those prophecies were about how God's kingdom would surpass all human kingdoms in glory, power, majesty, and longevity. And these prophecies are now revealed in Christ!

As Christians, we have the privilege of joining God as he builds his eternal kingdom through the work of his Son, Jesus. What incredible news! Do you realize the majesty of God's grand plan to redeem the world? Does it leave you in awe at the privilege we have to join God in Christ? What roles has God given you to specifically participate in the spread of his kingdom?

Study Guide

The following exercises and study questions are meant to help us see how Christ should be first in the lives of all believers. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.

Sermon Follow-up Question



Read (or listen to) all of Colossians at some point this week. Then, return to Colossians 1:24–2:5 as the focus for this week’s study.

Highlight

1) Based on your study this week, how would you describe Paul's ministry?

2) According to this passage, list Paul's goals that tell us why he is working so hard.

3) According to the early verses in Colossians 2, what encourages the heart?

4) To what does Paul refer to as "riches" and "treasures"?

1)

2)

3)

4)

Explain

5) Which of Paul's stated goals do you think is the most essential in his ministry?

6) In 1:25, Paul views his ministry as stewardship from God. What does it mean to be a good steward? How is stewardship different from ownership?

7) How would you describe being mature in Christ (1:28)?

8) What is it that allows Paul to rejoice in his sufferings?

5)

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8)

Apply

- 9) What role has God given you to specifically participate in the spread of his kingdom? If you don't know what that is yet, what are your next steps to discover what it will be?
- 10) In what ways do you feel that you are lacking in maturity in Christ? In what ways do you feel like you are growing in maturity in Christ? How do you plan to continue growing in these ways?
- 11) In this passage, Paul describes his ministry as both a calling (1:25) and a struggle (1:29–2:1). Describe the differences between both words. When kingdom work gets hard, do you typically take that as a sign to stop or keep going? (There is no right or wrong answer here! This just shows how your personality typically responds.)
- 12) What kinds of things instill a passion in you great enough to look past struggle and suffering? Why are those things so important to you? Does the gospel of Jesus Christ motivate you in this way? Why or why not?

9)

10)

11)

12)

Respond in Prayer

- Praise Christ for the ways he endured afflictions for the sake of his church (1:24). Thank God for examples, like Paul, who embody Christ's sufferings.
- Ask God to show you things that may be hindering your own maturity in Christ (1:28).
- Ask God to give you tangible ways that you can steward your time, talent, and treasure for your small group, your church, and your community (1:28–29).



Prayer Journal

Make time this week to update your prayer journal as a small group, focusing on a few specific areas: Where is it hardest to put Christ first above all? Where is it easiest to put Christ first above all? Some of us might start with the categories of time, talent, and treasure, while others might be more specific in their answers.

Pray together as a small group, asking that God's power would be put on display in our lives (especially in our areas of struggle) so that we can be faithful to display with our lives what we profess with our mouths: that Jesus is Lord of all and first in everything. As you pray, listen for God's voice. And let's continue to look for God to move and listen for God's voice over the next week, for how he might answer our prayers as a community.

Next Steps in Stewardship

The following exercises and questions are opportunities for all of us and our small groups to apply what we're learning in real, tangible ways. Complete this section after you discuss the study guide with your small group. Our prayer is that 100 percent of our church will put Jesus first in their lives. In this season, we believe it's important for all of us to ask God what it looks like to put Jesus first in our time, our talent, and our treasure. Consider these practical next steps to grow in stewardship of your time, talent, and treasure.

Sacrifice

This week, we've studied about sacrifice. A sacrifice occurs any time we freely offer to give up something of value to the benefit of someone or something else. Jesus sacrificed his life so that we might be reconciled to God. Reflecting on Christ's sacrificial death gave the Apostle Paul the ability to endure his sufferings willfully and with joy. After we gaze at the love that Jesus has for us (displayed in his sacrifice for our sins on the cross), it moves us to bring glory to God by our own sacrifices.

Take a few moments to examine how you steward your time, talent, and treasure and ask the Holy Spirit to soften your heart to freely make sacrifices in each of these areas for the sake of kingdom work. How is God leading you to respond to the sacrifice of Jesus?

Time: There is only so much time we are given each day. So when we say "yes" to one thing, we often are saying "no" to another. In what ways are you tempted to say "yes" to temporal things and "no" to things of eternal significance? Are there some things in your life that you'd like to say "yes" to? If so, how you can find time this week to make it happen?

Talent: Though it's difficult to admit, our lives often communicate to others, "I will never put your needs above my own." On the contrary, Paul rejoiced in laying aside his comfort in order to continue the work of spreading the gospel. Since the gospel message is worthy of our sacrifice, how can you leverage your strengths and abilities for the advancement of the kingdom of God?

Treasure: Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary made us holy, blameless, and above reproach. It cost him everything. In the same way, we are all called to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), and we are blessed to be a blessing to others. How, then, should sacrificing our treasure impact our family, our neighbors, our workplace, and our church?

Practical Step: Tracking Our Time

In order to better steward our time for kingdom work, we need to know how we spend it each week. This week, make a time budget in order to visualize how you spend the time that God has given you. Brad Hambrick has provided a helpful template which you can access here: summitrdu.com/time.

To use this time budget, fill in your weekly activities: work, household chores, recreation, ministry, family time, etc. Start with activities that are easier to calculate, like sleep, work, and mealtimes. When you realize changes that need to be made in your regular schedule, note those changes in the column provided on the far right.

To see an example of what this time budget may look like, see the sample time budget in the Appendix.

Week Three

**Once Dead,
Now Alive
with Christ**

Colossians 2:6–3:11

Key Verses

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” - Colossians 2:6–7

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses ...” - Colossians 2:13

First Principles

- When we make Christ first in our lives, we make his story our story.
- The Christian life is described by walking in Christ—rooted in Christ, built up in him, and established in the faith.
- If we have died with Christ, we no longer want to run towards the sin he died to save us from.
- As new life in Christ begins in faith, so it should continue in faith.

Read

Thus far on our journey through Colossians, Paul has prayed for the Colossian church and its role in spreading the gospel (1:1–14), described Christ’s glory (1:15–23), and explained his own ministry as a response to Christ’s sacrifice (1:24–2:5). Here is how Paul has already described the change that Christ’s work on the cross brings for us:

Before Christ:

Domain of darkness

Alienated and hostile in mind

Doing evil deeds

After Christ's Work on the Cross:

Transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (1:13)

Reconciled to God through Christ (1:21–22)

Holy, blameless, and above reproach before him (1:21–22)

In 2:6–3:11, Paul gives further detail about what we were when we were dead in our sins and what life looks like when we are alive in Christ. This passage includes two wonderful images for the Christian life.

First, the Christian life is described as walking in Christ—rooted in Christ, built up in him, and established in the faith (2:6–7). When we think about being rooted in Christ, this might sound odd, especially to those of us who are new to the Christian faith. But what Paul is saying is that Christ is not only our first above all, preeminent Savior (like we learned in week one), but he is also our foundation. Walking in Christ means that we look to him in all things. Every decision we make, every thought, every choice should be rooted in the never-changing love of Jesus Christ.

Second, Christ is in his people (3:11). This builds off the concept in 2:10 that we have been filled in Christ. Again, for those new to Christianity, the idea of Christ being in you might sound odd, but God's Word tells us repeatedly that Christ lives in us (Romans 8:10; 2 Corinthians 4:6–7; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:17), and through this union, we are changed! Christ in you is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). If this idea is a foreign concept to you, spend some time in those passages of Scripture cited above and let the power of God's Word penetrate your heart and mind.

Ephesians 3:16–19 summarizes both of these concepts to say, “that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that *Christ may dwell in your hearts through **faith***—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,

that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (emphasis added).

As described in these passages, the life that we have in Jesus Christ is a new life, free from sin and made possible by Christ alone. *This changes everything about how we live!*

A key word that describes our new life with Christ is faith. Paul would say elsewhere in Scripture that the Christian life is lived by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20). This means that our new life in Christ begins with faith as we believe that Jesus is Lord and God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9–10). And, just as the Christian life begins with faith, it also continues with ongoing faith in an invisible God. Our walk with Christ is by faith and not by physical sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). As new life in Christ begins in faith, so it should continue in faith—each day and through every season of life.

But there is so much that can hold us back from living in the victory that Christ won for us. Often, it’s hard to turn away from our old way of life, when we were living as dead in our sin. Our old way of life can feel so comfortable, natural, and appealing. Christ defeated sin so that we could be free from it and start living the life he created us to live. To do this, we must actively put to death the sin that still resides within us and choose to walk in faith. Our small group time this week will be devoted to identifying those old habits and ways of thinking that distract us from true life in Christ.

In 2:6–3:11, Paul gives us the secret to killing off our sin: When we make Christ first in our lives, we make his story our story. And we aren’t called to do this alone! Read the verses below and notice how often Paul uses the words “with Christ” or “with him.”

- **2:12:** “having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith”
- **2:13:** “you, who were dead God made alive together with him”
- **2:20:** “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations”

- **3:1:** “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is”
- **3:3:** “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”
- **3:4:** “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

If we have died with Christ, we no longer want to run towards the sin he died to save us from. If we have risen with Christ, we leave the stuff from our old lives behind. If we consider our lives to truly be with Christ in heaven, then as an old hymn wisely says, “the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.” (Helen H. Lemmel, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus,” Public Domain.) When our hearts are softened to this good news, the gospel of Jesus, we are forever changed, and we’ll begin to steward our time, talent, and treasure for the sake of kingdom work! This is what it means to walk with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Do we have faith that Jesus is Lord and that he’s done everything necessary to save us? If so, then let us also continue to walk by faith, looking and listening each day for how God is calling us to follow him in faith.

Study Guide

The following exercises and study questions are meant to help us see how Christ should be first in the lives of all believers. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.

Sermon Follow-up Question



Read (or listen to) all of Colossians at some point this week. Then, return to Colossians 2:6–3:11 as the focus for this week’s study.

Highlight

1) As you read Colossians this week, take note of every mention of the word “walk.” How does each mention of “walk” fit into the message of Colossians?

2) Earlier in this week’s study, we listed three descriptions of what it was like to be dead in our sins and alive in Christ from Colossians 1:13–22. For this week, find all the descriptions throughout Colossians about what it means to be dead in our sins. You will find many of them in our passage for this week, Colossians 2:6–3:11. We’ve included a few examples to get you started.

- Trapped in the domain of darkness (1:13)
- Alienated and hostile in mind toward God (1:21–22)
- Doing evil deeds (1:21–22)

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-

3) In your own words, summarize what it means to be dead apart from Christ.

4) Now, describe some aspect of what it means to be alive in Christ, according to 2:6–3:11.

5) What is being renewed in this passage? How does that renewal take place?

1)

3)

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Apply

- 11) Putting to death old sinful practices is not only wise (3:6) but also necessary since we have been unified with Christ. How does our union with Christ (being made alive together with him and raised with him) encourage you to turn away from sin?

- 12) According to Colossians, how does a Christian grow in maturity? How can you personally pursue maturity this week?

- 13) Why do man-made rules and regulations fail to bring about real change? How are Paul's commands to believers in 2:6–3:11 different from man-made rules and regulations?

- 14) Our sins and earthly desires often point to areas where Christ is not first above all. In what areas do you struggle to put Christ first above all? How might we train ourselves to constantly bring our old habits under the obedience of Christ?

11)

12)

13)

14)

Respond in Prayer

- Praise God for uniting us to Christ (1:9–13). Thank God that we don't merely enjoy gifts from him, but we get to enjoy the greatest of all gifts—God himself!
- Ask God for strength to “put to death ... what is earthly in you” (3:5). Ask him to lead you away from self-made religion and toward union with Christ to aid you “in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (2:23).
- Ask God to give you a heart that “seeks the things that are above, where Christ is” (3:1).
- Praise God that he views you as holy and beloved because of Christ and ask the Holy Spirit to clothe you with compassion, kindness, humility, and patience (3:12).



Prayer Journal

Return to your small group prayer journal this week. Ask God to give us specific ideas and applications for how we can put Christ first as a community and as individual believers. As you discuss and pray together, go beyond the general categories of time, talent, and treasure. Listen for God's voice to identify specific attitudes, actions, or habits in our lives, that we might be faithful to proclaim Jesus as Lord and truly first in everything. And let's continue to look for God to move and listen for God's voice over the next week, for how he might answer our prayers as a community.

Next Steps in Stewardship

The following exercises and questions are opportunities for all of us and our small groups to apply what we're learning in real, tangible ways. Complete this section after you discuss the study guide with your small group. Our prayer is that 100 percent of our church will put Jesus first in their lives. In this season, we believe it's important for all of us to ask God what it looks like to put Jesus first in our time, our talent, and our treasure. Consider these practical next steps to grow in stewardship of your time, talent, and treasure.

Walking in Christ

We read this week about walking in Christ and being rooted in him. But what are some practical ways that Christians do this? Jen Wilkin says this, "The heart cannot love what the mind does not know." (Jen Wilkin, *Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both Our Hearts and Our Minds* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 31.) How do you get to know someone? You spend time with them, talk with them, and learn more about them.

God is honored when we decide to spend time with him rather than on our own desires and interests. These are usually not bad interests and desires, in fact, they are often good things! But as we learned in week one, Christ is preeminent, first above all. These good things can get in the way of our relationships with Christ when we prioritize them over walking with him.

How much time each day or week do you spend intentionally pursuing Christ and how do you spend your time with him? Do you normally do this through prayer? Bible reading? Worship through singing? Talking about the Lord with other believers? These are all great ways to spend time with Christ.

For those who might be unsure how to spend time with Jesus, start with the daily Bible reading plan provided by the Summit available online at summitrdu.com/dbr. Read the assigned

chapter each day, then spend a few moments talking to God in prayer and listening for what he has to say to you through his Word.

Consider how you can prioritize your relationship with Christ this week. Here are a few questions that will help jumpstart your brainstorming session:

- What would happen if you committed to spend time with God each day? Or if you increased your weekly time with God by one hour?
- How could you serve your community in a way that demonstrates the new life that you have in Christ?
- Because we have been reconciled with Christ by faith, the things of the flesh no longer have any place in our lives. Is there any sin this week that you need to stop spending your time pursuing? If so, don't do it alone. Tell someone in your small group and ask them to walk beside you this week.
- Ask God to bring to mind one non-Christian in your life. How often do you pray for them? How can you serve him or her with your time, talent, and/or treasure this week?

Practical Step: Tracking Our Treasure

Take some time this week to examine your personal finances and your family budget. For those who might need some specific steps on how to budget, check out the stewardship resources and trainings we offer at summitrdu.com/stewardship. For those who need practical help building a budget for the first time, check out the resources available from Dave Ramsey, such as his simple guide available at daveramsey.com/budgeting/how-to-budget.

After reviewing your personal finances, take some time to pray about the **FIRST Faith Commitment Card**, that comes as a companion to the FIRST series. Our elders are praying that 100 percent of our church will commit to put Jesus first in their finances and make a **FIRST Faith Commitment** on Nov. 17 and 18. This week, set aside specific time to ask the Lord how he is calling you to put Jesus first in your treasure, but don't do it alone. Talk and pray about it with your small group or another church member. If you have a family, discuss it with your spouse and children and let it be a family discussion. We encourage everyone to learn more about the **FIRST Faith Commitment Card** by viewing the corresponding video at summitrdu.com/first.

But remember, our church family is diverse and is full of individuals and families from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Not everyone's giving will or should look alike: This is why we want you to brainstorm together rather than alone. It is a beautiful thing to share our uniquely gifted talents and treasures as a church family in order to put Christ first above all.

Week Four

Our New Life in Christ

Colossians 3:12–4:5

Key Verses

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” - Colossians 3:17

First Principles

- When we realize that Jesus is our very life, we capture the essence of Christ first above all.
- Part of our new life in Christ is that the Spirit gives us a newfound desire for God and for living in ways that honor him.
- As we become more like Christ, our lives begin to reflect the redemption that Christ brings.

Read

This week, we will complete our four-part journey through Colossians by dwelling on our new life in Christ. We saw last week that Jesus has saved us from the devastating effects of living in a sinful world. Before Christ, our lives were characterized by selfishness and self-centeredness, but as we walk with Jesus, our lives can now be characterized by compassion, love, forgiveness, harmony, and thanksgiving. As we mature in Christ, these characteristics will become more precious to us, as ways of life that are vastly more fulfilling and life-giving.

We cannot live the Christian life on our own power. Other parts of the Bible, especially Paul's other letters, reinforce this. We need the Holy Spirit to help us choose compassion over self-centeredness, love over vengeance, harmony over drama, and more (see Colossians 1:8; Ephesians 4:3; 5:18). Part of our new life in Christ is that the Spirit gives us a newfound desire

for God and for living in ways that honor him. Every Christian must learn to listen daily for the voice of God in his Word. God is a person and he desires a relationship with each one of us. The Holy Spirit enables us to hear from God and follow him in obedience, even in the most ordinary circumstances.

But make no mistake, our new life in Christ, under the Spirit's power, is about much more than behavioral change. So many people—even well-intentioned Christians—approach life by striving for good behavior and acceptance by others around us. Do you? The only true way to live a life of God-honoring behavior is by walking in Christ. But the good fruit of living in Christ is not the primary goal: The real prize of the Christian life is our relationship with Christ. In fact, Paul says that Christ is our life (Colossians 3:4). When we realize that Jesus is our very life, we capture the essence of Christ first above all.

The benefit of a new life in Christ, walking in his footsteps of self-sacrifice, is that, as we mature, we become more like Christ! And as we become more like Christ, our lives begin to reflect the redemption that Christ brings. Colossians 3:12–17 says that we will have a supernatural peace within us. This passage also says that our relationships can be transformed and life-giving as we walk with Christ and become more like him. We will be built up, mature, rooted in love, and filled by God most when we are walking with Christ and relishing in the new life that only he can give. Above all else, this is what it means to grow as a believer and to put Christ first in your life.

Trying to become a good Christian and steward the time, talent, and treasure that God has given you is fruitless without the help of the Holy Spirit. It is our hope that these past few weeks haven't pushed you to try to become better in your own strength. Rather, we want you to see Jesus as so glorious and first above all that your heart is stirred to walk in him and allow the Holy Spirit to transform your life.

Study Guide

The following exercises and study questions are meant to help us see how Christ should be first in the lives of all believers. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.

Sermon Follow-up Question



Read (or listen to) all of Colossians at some point this week. Then, return to Colossians 3:12–4:5 as the focus for this week’s study.

Highlight

1) As you read this week, look through all of Colossians and find places that describe our new life in Christ. Be sure to list the characteristics, but also the other results of our union with Christ. We've started the list for you, but fill in the remaining space with your own answers.

- Love for others (1:4, 8)

- Strengthened with God's power (1:11)

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2) List out the commands in 3:12–4:5. What do you think was Paul's ultimate goal for the Colossians?

Explain

- 3) According to 3:12–4:5, how does the gospel (the good news of how we have been reconciled to God) affect our relationships with other people? How does it change the way you view your work, family, or difficult relationships?

- 4) Why does Paul emphasize the importance of thankfulness? What does a lack of thankfulness reveal about us?

- 5) In 3:14, what is the characteristic that Paul says is the most important? Why do you think he prioritizes that particular virtue?

- 6) The peace of Christ mentioned in 3:15 is less about an individual's feelings and more about peaceful relationships in community. In other words, because we have peace with God in Christ, we no longer need to feel relational hostility toward others. How would you articulate the peace of Christ? What does this look like specifically in how we relate to other Christians and non-Christians?

- 7) Now that we are at the end of our study of Colossians, how would you summarize the message of the book in one or two sentences? Use specific verses to support your summary statement. Keep in mind, no one's summary will be perfect, so don't put too much pressure on yourself. Just give it a try and then share it with your small group!

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9)

10)

11)

Respond in Prayer

- Praise God for choosing you and forgiving you in Christ (3:12–13).
- Pray that God would make his Word dwell in you richly (3:16).
- Pray to God and thank him for the people in your small group and for the ways you admonish each other and push each other towards wisdom (3:16).
- Pray for the people that you want to share the gospel with in the coming weeks and months (4:2–3).



Prayer Journal

Each week, we have been keeping a prayer journal as we ask God what it looks like to put Jesus first in our lives. As a part of your small group meeting, look back over the prayer requests from each previous week of our study. Praise God for the prayers that he's answered and continue to ask him to move where he has yet to answer your prayers.

Next Steps in Stewardship

The following exercises and questions are opportunities for all of us and our small groups to apply what we're learning in real, tangible ways. Complete this section after you discuss the study guide with your small group. Our prayer is that 100 percent of our church will put Jesus first in their lives. In this season, we believe it's important for all of us to ask God what it looks like to put Jesus first in our time, our talent, and our treasure. Consider these practical next steps to grow in stewardship of your time, talent, and treasure.

Work Heartily

Colossians 3:23–24 reminds us, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

Christ is first above all, so it makes sense that everything we do, we do for our Savior! If you come from a background where you've been taught that you have to work to earn your standing with God, you might be tempted to misapply this verse. But make no mistake, we do not work heartily for the Lord in order to earn our salvation. Instead, we work heartily for the Lord because He has saved us and given us new life in Christ.

There are so many ways we can work for the Lord as a response to the good news we have in Christ. For those who are in the workforce, your daily job matters. The way you represent Christ to your coworkers is kingdom work. For those of you who are students, your studies and presence on campus matter. For those of you who are raising children, your parenting matters. For those of you who are retired, the way you utilize this season can make an eternal impact. And yet, it is important to understand that our work isn't just limited to our vocations. We can work heartily for the Lord by the way we steward our time, talent, and treasure for the sake of our church, local community, and the greater world.

You can work heartily for the Lord by choosing to invest in your neighbors and the people God brings across your path each day. Opening up your home, making a meal, and being a good friend are all ways you can invest your time, talent, and treasure for the Lord. Deciding to be intentional in your local grocery store, coffee shop, and restaurants by tipping well, engaging the people around you, and listening to the Holy Spirit is kingdom work! The verse says, “whatever you do,” so literally whatever you do and wherever your day takes you, you can work and serve others heartily for the Lord.

Here are a few questions that will help jumpstart your brainstorming session on how you can work heartily this week by stewarding your time, talent, and treasure:

Aside from your vocation, what are some ways you can work heartily for the Lord in your neighborhood and local community?

Reflect again on 3:12–17. Are there any characteristics listed in those verses that you feel God has specifically gifted you in? Are there any characteristics that you need to ask the Holy Spirit to grow in you?

Colossians talks about sharing the gospel with outsiders and helping believers to become more mature in Christ. How will you steward your time, talent, and/or treasure in order to be involved in making disciples in the coming year? How will you be directly involved in missions here and abroad? Have you found a creative way to use your talent to serve the church or local community?

Practical Step: Using Our Talent

Over the last four weeks, we've given you practical steps on tracking your time and treasure. But this week, we want to focus on your talent. Now, before you start panicking, we aren't asking you to break out your old tap shoes. Instead, we are asking you to evaluate how you can use your God-given strengths and abilities to heartily serve the church (3:23).

Here at the Summit there are many different ways you can steward your talent through serving our church, local community, and our world. Service opportunities include:

- Communications team
- First Impressions
- Men's discipleship
- National and international missions
- Prayer ministry
- Production
- ServeRDU (local outreach)
- Stewardship and generosity
- Summit College
- Summit Kids
- Summit Students
- Summit Worship
- Women's discipleship

We serve with all our heart because we understand that, ultimately, we are really serving the Lord Christ. God has given our church a great vision and we are determined to serve him with our time, talent, and treasure.

This week, talk to your small group about how you specifically can steward your talent to serve our church in one of the ways listed above. Then, reach out to our church and get involved! We can't wait to walk beside you on this journey of stewarding your time, talent, and treasure for kingdom work.

Appendix

Sample

Time Budget

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Activities	Type				Time		Changes Needed
	Essential	Energy Giving	Energy Taking	Planned Generosity	Hours Required in 7 days (168)	Hours Required in 28 Days (672)	
List All Your Activities							How to Make Needed Changes
Nightly Sleep					49		Start with 50/week or 200/month
Family							Minimum 17 hours/week
Meals together (10 per week)	x	x			5		
Family devotions	x	x			3		
Attend/serve church together	x	x			2		
Play time with kids	x		x		7		
Date night	x	x			1	4	
Time with spouse	x	x			7		
Work							
Base work hours	x				40		
Commute to/from work	x				10		
Overtime			x		5		
Side jobs for extra \$			x		5		
Maintenance							
Getting ready for the day	x		x		5		
Exercise			x		3		
House repairs & yard work	x		x		1	4	
General chores	x		x		4		
Doing the budget	x		x		0.5		
Recreation							
Sleeping in or nap	x	x			2		
Personal devotions	x	x			3.5		
Sports league		x			2		
Watching television					14		
Ministry							
Lead small group	x	x		x	2		
Preparation for small group	x		x	x	1		
Other ministry		x		x	2		
Spontaneous generosity			x		3		If no time put here, then always "in the way"
Other							
Talking to parents		x			2		
Kids' sporting events			x		5		
Miscellaneous					9	35	5% for general inefficiency of life
	Total Time I've Planned				193		
	Time God Has Provided				168	672	

