

I NO LONGER LIVE...

IDENTITY

BUT CHRIST LIVES IN ME.

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INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

The Apostle Paul is a towering figure in the story of the New Testament. His church planting missionary journeys in the book of Acts have inspired missionary movements and missiological strategies over the past 2,000 years. His writings, passed down to us in the form of thirteen letters, have shaped the doctrine and practice of churches through the ages. The Reformation was anchored in a recovery and reinterpretation of Paul's theology of justification and helped launch Protestantism in the 1500s. Today Paul's letters are preached each Sunday to Christians around the world and memorized & studied at MBC and in the broader Christian community in Midland.

This resource is designed to help you engage one of Paul's letters each week for thirteen weeks. Each letter includes the following ways of interacting with each Pauline epistle:

- *Day 1 where you are challenged to read the entire letter in a single day*
- *Day 2 where you read a selection from the book, typically 1-2 chapters, that focuses on a key theme or idea.*
- *Day 3 where you may read only a paragraph and reflect more intensely and deeply on a few short verses.*
- *A memory verse for the week*
- *Reflection questions for either small group discussion or personal reflection & journaling.*

Each of these ways of interacting the Paul's letter is independent and stands alone, so that you can decide as an individual, family or HomeGroup how this study best fits within this season of your life. There is certainly benefit in doing all the options each week, and your understanding and application of the letter will be enhanced by spending more time in Scripture. However, it is also possible to use only one part of the resource and still derive benefit. In addition to this resource, you might find it helpful to use a blank journal for recording some of your answers to questions.

The Appendix to this study contains several resources for understanding Paul's life, letters & teachings, including maps, charts, and some tips for reading and studying.

We hope this resource helps you engage Paul's letters, so that over the next three months you learn to define yourself increasingly by who God says you are in Christ. As Paul says in Philippians we want you "to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil 3:10) thereby enjoying the abundant, Spirit empowered life God has for you now.

ROMANS

I AM DECLARED RIGHTEOUS IN CHRIST

Memory Verse:
Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 56-57, The letter to the Romans was likely written during Paul's three month stay in Corinth (cf. Act 20:3 & Rom 15:25) before journeying to deliver financial aid to poor Christians in Jerusalem.

Place of Origin¹: Corinth, Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2) regarded by many as the letter carrier is from Cenchreae, a port city next to Corinth.

Purpose²: Three complementary purposes are proposed for the writing of the letter to the Romans.

1. *A Missionary Purpose:* Paul wanted to partner with the church in Rome in his mission to Spain. The letter to the Romans then is partially an introduction to Paul and his gospel so that believers in Rome can have confidence entering into a missionary partnership with Paul (see Romans 15:22-24).
2. *An Apologetic Purpose:* Throughout the letter Paul uses diatribe and responds to objections that could be raised to his gospel. Paul is laying out his understanding of the gospel in order to defend himself and his ministry from unjust accusations that have circled among Jews throughout the Roman Empire. Far from undermining and rejecting his Jewish identity, Paul recognizes that gospel of Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment and consummation of God's work that was begun in the Old Testament. As he shows in Romans 4, justification has always been by faith in the promises of God, and thus is grounded in grace and not works.
3. *A Pastoral Purpose:* The last section of the book indicates that the church at Rome, like many churches, struggled with divisions.

¹ Wright & Bird, *The New Testament in Its World*, 506.

² Dunn, "Letter to the Romans" in Hawthorne, Martin & Reid eds. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*,

Rome itself was a large cosmopolitan city and the small network of house churches scattered across the city would have been made up of Christians from various geographic and ethnic backgrounds, as well as different social and economic levels. This made division and hurt feelings a likely scenario. Paul, who has had experience working in such churches wants to offer encouragement and support to these believers in Rome, whom he loves though he has not met.

Outline:

- *Romans 1-3: The Unrighteousness of All*
- *Romans 4-5: The Righteousness God Provides*
- *Romans 6-8: The Righteousness that Holds Us*
- *Romans 9-11: The Righteousness that is Beyond Us*
- *Romans 12-16: The Righteousness We Are Called to Show*

Key Theme(s): The righteousness of God holds together the threads of the letter. The idea of righteousness includes the ideas that God is just, faithful, and gracious. Righteousness is not just an abstract moral category, but is a relational category, implying right action within the context of a relationship. God as creator is righteous in his dealings with sinful humanity (Rom 1-3). God as covenant keeper is righteous in his dealings with Israel (Rom 9-11). Ultimately, it is within the death and resurrection of Jesus that God's righteousness is revealed most clearly because the sin of the world is dealt with, and the gracious never-ending love of God in forgiving sin and restoring lives is demonstrated (4-8). Ultimately, the letter to the Romans calls for those who have been declared righteous, to embody that righteousness in our lives, relationships, and communities (Rom 12-16).

DAY 1 STUDY: ROMANS 1-16

Reading a large chunk of Scripture is a rewarding activity but can be challenging. Try to do the following before embarking on this journey.

- *Set aside one or more spaces in your day, where you are likely going to be able to read. It will likely take a little over an hour to read the book and spend a few minutes reflecting on it.*
- *Decide whether you will read or listen. Listening to Romans on an audio bible may be a great option. After all this letter was originally heard by a church.*
- *If you are reading grab a writing utensil to star or underline verses or passages that stand out to you. If you are uncomfortable writing in your bible use a journal to jot down verses that strike you as significant.*
- *Pray before you begin reading or listening. Ask God to guide your heart and mind to be encouraged, challenged, or convicted. Expect for God to be at work through this time.*

Read the Letter to the Romans

Reflect on the Letter to the Romans

1. *What words, or ideas stood out to you as you read/listened? Look back at your highlights or notes.*
2. *How do you see the heart of God being revealed through this letter?*
3. *What was encouraging/convicting to you?*
4. *What truths were you reminded of?*
5. *What calls to action stood out to you?*

Respond

Take time to pray and consider how God may be calling you to change your emotions, your thoughts, or your actions through this letter.

DAY 2 STUDY: ROMANS 8

Romans 8 is one of the richest chapters in the Bible containing some of the most encouraging and powerful expressions of God's love.

Read Romans 8:1-39

Try and summarize the main idea of the chapter in a single sentence.

Read Romans 8:1-11

Notice the ways Paul emphasizes our relationship with Christ in these verses. Look at prepositional phrases that express our being "in Christ" (8:1) or "Christ is in you" (8:10). Expand to consider the ways the Spirit is included in this expression of relationship (8:9). Finally, consider the ways our actions flow from this relational reality. We "set our mind on the Spirit" (8:6) and walk "according to the Spirit (8:4).

Why does Paul repeatedly stress the reality of Christ being in us and our being in Christ?

What does it look like practically to set your mind on the Spirit?

How is God calling you to walk according to the Spirit today?

Read Romans 8:12-17

Paul frames our relationship here around the idea of adoption and sonship. The tragedy of living in sin is that it is inconsistent with our true identity as children of God.

How does thinking about yourself as a child of God alter your relationship to sin?

How does viewing yourself as a beloved child of God, in whom the Spirit is at work, empower you to put sin to death? What happens when we try to deal with our sin in our own strength?

Read Romans 8:18-30

Paul here lays out a stunning and hopeful vision of our future glory. He does not doge the present suffering and pain that is felt both personally, and even within creation, but he reframes that pain in light of God's ultimate victory and glory that will be revealed. In addition, we are reminded that God is himself, through his Spirit with us in our suffering, praying for us constantly.

How does the hope of glory allow us to endure suffering?

What suffering in your life or world do you need to reframe in light of our future hope of glory?

How does the present reality of God's Spirit within you, praying for your change your experience of pain and hurt?

Read Romans 8:31-39

Within this last section of the chapter Paul deals with the dangers that seem to threaten our very souls and bodies. The closing of the chapter echoes the opening of the chapter as we are reminded that there is no condemnation for the believer because we have been justified by God on the basis of Christ's death and ongoing intercession, and not our own moral efforts (cf. 8:1 & 8:31-34). The external threats of sickness and death, the spiritual forces of darkness, the political power and might of Rome, all of these pail in comparison to the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus (cf. 8:35-39).

How can you ground your identity in God's love for you demonstrated through the death of Jesus?

How are you tempted to look to behaviors or achievements for security, rather than looking to Jesus for your security?

What practically can you do to experience and remember the victory that is ours in Christ Jesus?

DAY 3 STUDY: ROMANS 12:1-2

Today we will take time to practice a more contemplative reading approach to our passage.³

Preparation: Make sure that you are in a quiet place where you can be undisturbed. Quiet any noise. Turn off your phone, if possible. Put out of sight and mind your to-do list. Take a moment before reading to be still, to breathe deeply and come before the Lord, prayerfully laying your distractions and anxieties at His feet. Ask the Lord to speak to you so that you can be encouraged through His Word.

Listening: Read the entire passage without stopping. Read it a second time more slowly, writing down or underlining words, phrases or concepts that emerge from the passage. Read it a third time, visualizing key words, actions, or concepts from the passage. Prayerfully remember that God speaks through His Word and that this passage is for you and for your good. Ask God to help you see His truth in this reading.

Reflecting: Now look at the words you have highlighted and meditate on them. Imagine your own life being transformed or changed by the words of Scripture. Meditation will mean chewing on a word or phrase over and over again, using our minds to picture what it might look like for that word or phrase to be fully expressed in our life with God.

Praying: Pray the passage back to God. Your prayer may take many forms, including confession, praise, thanksgiving, or a cry for help.

Obeying: Prayerfully seek to discern how this passage will transform you in your choices, attitudes, or thoughts. Be open to specific promptings of obedience: a needed conversation with a friend, a confession to an offended party, an act of kindness towards someone.

³ This approach to reading Scripture is called *lectio divina*. The specific terminology used here is drawn from Richard Foster's work *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*, 62-72.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Romans has been such an important part of the life of the church?
2. What prior experience do you have with the letter to the Romans? How would you like to grow in your understanding of this letter?
3. How is sin viewed in our culture today? How is sin viewed in the church?
4. What does it mean for God to be righteous? Why is God's righteousness such an important theme for Paul?
5. How does our justification connect to Jesus' death and resurrection? How does justification relate to our dying and rising with Christ?
6. Does Paul believe that Christians can become perfect in this life? How do you explain the reality of sin in the lives of people who have been justified?
7. What does sanctification mean? How are you growing in your sanctification during this time in your life?
8. How does our hope of glorification impact our daily living now?
9. Is there support in Romans 13 for blind nationalistic obedience? Why or why not?
10. What are some contemporary forms of judgement in the church about things that are not of first importance?
11. How is God's character depicted in Romans? How does this section of Scripture impact our theology?
12. How does Romans help us understand God's mission and thus our mission?
13. What does this letter urge the church, and you personally, to believe, to hope for, and to do?

1 CORINTHIANS

I AM A MEMBER OF CHRIST'S BODY, THE CHURCH

Memory Verse:

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

INTRODUCTION TO 1 CORINTHIANS

Author: Paul & Sosthenes

Date: A.D. 53

Place of Origin: Ephesus

Purpose: Paul's purpose in writing 1 Corinthians is to instruct this young, predominantly Gentile church on how to live as followers of Jesus. The church in Corinth was profoundly influenced by their Greco-Roman culture and thus dealt with divisions based on rhetorical skill and status, sexual brokenness, practices of Christian worship, believer's relationship to pagan temples which were also community/civic centers, and theological understandings of their faith.

Outline⁴:

1 Corinthians 1-4: Chaos in Church Leadership

1 Corinthians 5-7: Chaos in Moral Living

1 Corinthians 8-14: Chaos in Worship

1 Corinthians 15: Chaos in Theology

1 Corinthians 16: Closing Matters

Key Theme(s): Paul's primary theme within the letter to the Corinthians is the outworking of the believer's new identity as a member of Christ's body, the church. Because followers of Jesus are now a part of this new community their identities and lives are transformed. No longer can power and prestige define their leadership (chapters 1-4). There is now a new way for Christian to relate to their sexuality and their relationship with other believers (chapters 5-7). Furthermore, the believer's relationship to pagan temples is now different, both because of their commitment to worship Jesus but also

⁴ Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 284.

because of their commitment to care for their brothers and sisters in Christ who may be influenced by their lived example (chapters 8-10). Christian gatherings for worship defined by orderliness, reverence, mutual encouragement and love for one another, rather than assertiveness, self-promotion, and boasting (chapters 11-14). Finally, the future assurance of our resurrection life fuels our daily living now. The ultimate triumph of the Christian is guaranteed because of Christ's resurrection, even if in this life we face persecution and hardship (chapter 15).

DAY 1 STUDY: 1 CORINTHIANS 1-16

Reading a large chunk of Scripture is a rewarding activity but can be challenging. Try to do the following before embarking on this journey.

- *Set aside one or more spaces in your day, where you are likely going to be able to read. It will likely take a little over an hour to read the book and spend a few minutes reflecting on it.*
- *Decide whether you will read or listen. Listening to 1 Corinthians on an audio bible may be a great option. After all this letter was originally heard by a church.*
- *If you are reading grab a writing utensil to star or underline verses or passages that stand out to you. If you are uncomfortable writing in your bible, use a journal to jot down verses that strike you as significant.*
- *Pray before you begin reading or listening. Ask God to guide your heart and mind to be encouraged, challenged, or convicted. Expect for God to be at work through this time.*

Read 1 Corinthians

Reflect on 1 Corinthians

1. *What words, or ideas stood out to you as you read/listened? Look back at your highlights or notes.*
2. *How do you see the heart of God being revealed through this letter?*
3. *What was encouraging/convicting to you?*
4. *What truths were you reminded of?*
5. *What calls to action stood out to you?*

Respond

Take time to pray and consider how God may be calling you to change your emotions, your thoughts, or your actions through this letter.

DAY 2 STUDY: 1 CORINTHIANS 15

Much is rightly made of the crucifixion of Jesus, however, 1 Corinthians 15 spotlights the necessity and hope that is provided by the resurrection of Jesus. Without the resurrection the cross is emptied of its power, but because of the resurrection the cross is made effective.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Paul's discussion opens with a reminder of the core elements of his gospel (15:3-4) and the reliability of Jesus' post resurrection appearances to people (15:5-8).

Why do you think it is necessary for Paul to remind the Corinthians of the gospel (15:1)? How and why do you sometimes need to be reminded of the foundational truths of the gospel? What can we do to help remind one another of these gospel truths?

What elements of the gospel story does Paul emphasize in these verses? Why are these moments in the story the most important?

Why do you think Paul emphasizes the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus? How do those post-resurrection appearances impact our faith today?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-34

Paul here lays out the possible consequences if the resurrection is not true (15:12-19) before moving into a description of what will take place because Christ has been raised (15:20-28). Paul closes the section by connecting his own lived experience to the reality of Christ's resurrection (15:29-34).

Paul is unafraid to unpack the potential consequences to belief if Christ has not been raised. Why would this take courage? How does Paul's intellectual honesty in facing this challenge head on, compare to the way Christians today engage difficult or threatening topics? What could we learn from Paul's honesty and directness?

What is the connection between Adam and Christ in these verses?

What does it mean for Jesus to be the firstfruits of the resurrection?

How does our resurrection and the future subjection of all things to the Son give our lives confidence and hope?

How did the resurrection change Paul's life and ministry (15:30-32)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

Paul offers an extended discussion of the nature of our resurrection bodies. Within the discussion he highlights the differences between the two but gives relatively little detailed information about resurrection bodies. Instead, Paul emphasizes the way resurrection bodies are connected to God's own life and power. We often think of heavenly and spiritual as words that mean immaterial, but when Paul used these words he was likely thinking of what fuels our resurrection bodies, God's own life Spirit. Resurrection bodies are *Spiritual*.

What is your concept of heaven? How might your concept of heaven impact the way you read these verses?

Reread these verses, replacing lowercase spiritual with uppercase Spiritual (emphasizing the power of the Spirit at work in a new way). How does this reading emphasize our union with God being the central feature of our resurrection bodies?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Paul now closes with hope filled and encouraging words about what will take place and the certainty of our future victory.

How can the certainty of our future transformation alter the way we live today?

How does the assurance of our ultimate victory over sin and death encourage you to live faithfully today?

How can you apply verse 58 to your own life situation?

DAY 3 STUDY: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31

Today we will take time to practice a more contemplative reading approach to our passage.⁵

Preparation: Make sure that you are in a quiet place where you can be undisturbed. Quiet any noise. Turn off your phone, if possible. Put out of sight and mind your to-do list. Take a moment before reading to be still, to breathe deeply and come before the Lord, prayerfully laying your distractions and anxieties at His feet. Ask the Lord to speak to you so that you can be encouraged through His Word.

Listening: Read the entire passage without stopping. Read it a second time more slowly, writing down or underlining words, phrases or concepts that emerge from the passage. Read it a third time, visualizing key words, actions, or concepts from the passage. Prayerfully remember that God speaks through His Word and that this passage is for you and for your good. Ask God to help you see His truth in this reading.

Reflecting: Now look at the words you have highlighted and meditate on them. Imagine your own life being transformed or changed by the words of Scripture. Meditation will mean chewing on a word or phrase over and over again, using our minds to picture what it might look like for that word or phrase to be fully expressed in our life with God.

Praying: Pray the passage back to God. Your prayer may take many forms, including confession, praise, thanksgiving, or a cry for help.

Obeying: Prayerfully seek to discern how this passage will transform you in your choices, attitudes, or thoughts. Be open to specific promptings of obedience: a needed conversation with a friend, a confession to an offended party, an act of kindness towards someone.

⁵ This approach to reading Scripture is called *lectio divina*. The specific terminology used here is drawn from Richard Foster's work *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*, 62-72.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What might Paul's experience with the Corinthians, most of whom were from a pagan background, say about the needs for instruction and discipleship in the contemporary church?
2. How well or poorly does the church, in your experience, both minister to and learn from the "nobodies" (persons without status) in its midst?
3. What contributions can the early chapters of 1 Corinthians make to your understanding of spirituality and ministry?
4. In what ways do sexual and legal activities in Corinth resemble our current culture? How is the church impacted by these practices?
5. How might Paul's response to the issue of eating meat associated with idols inform a contemporary understanding of such topics as freedom, rights, and love?
6. In what ways do problems of unity and diversity manifest themselves in the church?
7. What are the implications, both theological & practical for individual believers and for local churches of being the body of Christ?
8. What are some of the implications of a bodily resurrection for believers? How does the hope of our resurrection change the way we live today?
9. What are common social or spiritual indicators of status in the church? How do we sometimes make status or success an idol within the church?
10. How can we balance engagement with the world and appropriate withdrawal from the world? How does 1 Corinthians help us?
11. What does this letter urge the church, and you personally, to believe, hope for and do?

2 CORINTHIANS

I AM WEAK BUT CHRIST IN ME IS STRONG

Memory Verse:

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

INTRODUCTION TO 2 CORINTHIANS

Author: Paul & Timothy

Date: A.D. 65

Place of Writing: Paul wrote 2 Corinthians during his third missionary journey from Macedonia (2 Cor 2:12-13), likely the city of Philippi.

Purpose: 2 Corinthians was written as a defense of Paul's apostolic ministry of the gospel. However, behind Paul's personal defense is an exploration of the Christian life as being cruciform, in which believers are called to suffer like Jesus now in confidence of our future glory (2 Cor 4:17), all the while serving as an ambassador of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:11-6:2).

Outline:

2 Corinthians 1 – 7: Paul's Ministry Defended

- *2 Corinthians 1:1 - 2:13: Paul's Actions Defended*
- *2 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:18: Paul's Ministry of the New Covenant*
- *2 Corinthians 4:1-6:10: Paul's Ministry of Reconciliation*
- *2 Corinthians 6:11 – 7:16: Paul's Ministry with the Corinthians*

2 Corinthians 8 – 9: Paul's Ministry of Generosity

2 Corinthians 10 – 13: Paul's Ministry vs. the Super-Apostles

Key Theme(s):

In defending his ministry Paul develops several significant themes of the Christian life. Paul sees himself and other New Testament saints as ministers of the New Covenant that was brought into effect through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (2:12-3:18). This New Covenant brings about reconciliation (5:20) and transformation (3:18) but also involves suffering (4:17) and hardships (6:3-10). The characterization of Christian ministry as a ministry of reconciliation presents a beautiful and compelling picture of Christ's work on the

cross (5:11-6:2). The nature of God's grace calls for those that are new creation in Christ to be characterized by lifestyles of radical grace and generosity, especially in their generosity towards fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need (8:1-9:15). Paul's defense of his ministry chapters 10-13 presents us with some of the most passionate and personal moments of all Paul's writing. What is striking throughout this section is the prevalence of suffering in Paul's ministry (11:1§-33) and the radical truth that because of God's grace it is in weakness that Paul is strong (12:9-10).

DAY 1 STUDY: 2 CORINTHIANS 1-13

Reading a large chunk of Scripture is a rewarding activity but can be challenging. Try to do the following before embarking on this journey.

- *Set aside one or more spaces in your day, where you are likely going to be able to read. It will likely take a little over an hour to read the book and spend a few minutes reflecting on it.*
- *Decide whether you will read or listen. Listening to 1 Corinthians on an audio bible may be a great option. After all this letter was originally heard by a church.*
- *If you are reading grab a writing utensil to star or underline verses or passages that stand out to you. If you are uncomfortable writing in your bible, use a journal to jot down verses that strike you as significant.*
- *Pray before you begin reading or listening. Ask God to guide your heart and mind to be encouraged, challenged, or convicted. Expect for God to be at work through this time.*

Read 2 Corinthians

Reflect on 2 Corinthians

1. *What words, or ideas stood out to you as you read/listened? Look back at your highlights or notes.*
2. *How do you see the heart of God being revealed through this letter?*
3. *What was encouraging/convicting to you?*
4. *What truths were you reminded of?*
5. *What calls to action stood out to you?*

Respond

Take time to pray and consider how God may be calling you to change your emotions, your thoughts, or your actions through this letter.

DAY 2 STUDY: 2 CORINTHIANS 3-5

Paul's exploration of his ministry is ultimately an examination of the nature of gospel ministry for all believers. As you read and reflect on these chapters today, consider the divine power that is at work in you and the power of the gospel to transform you and those around you.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

Paul contrasts his identity as a minister of the new covenant with that of Moses. Jewish teachers who were troubling the church in Corinth would have appealed to Moses and so if Paul's ministry is superior to the ministry of Moses, then it is also superior to the ministry of these Jewish teachers.

What are some of the contrasts between the old ministry and the new ministry in these verses?

Why does Paul appeal to the work of the Holy Spirit within these verses?

The passage reaches a crescendo in 3:12-18. How is the ministry of Paul and other New Testament saint's superior to that of Moses in these verses?

What is the ultimate work of the Spirit in 3:17-18? How are you are being transformed into the image of Christ right now through the work of the Holy Spirit?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Paul here defends his ministry tactics and strategies, relying on the glory of God on display through Jesus, rather than on human cunning.

While we may not intend to do so, how are we sometimes drawn into ministering in ways that rely more on human ingenuity and cleverness, rather than on the Word of God?

How does 4:3-4 explain the reality that faithful ministries and ministers are not always results driven ministries?

How do individuals and churches balance the need to be wise and discerning in their use of tools and strategy, but still maintain primary focus and dependency on the Word of God working through the Spirit of God?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

In these verses Paul speaks candidly and openly about the reality of physical suffering as a minister of Christ. The treasure of the gospel is held within and proclaimed by frail human beings, whose weak bodies suffer and break down.

What are some ways suffering is spoken about in 4:7-12?

How does God use our weakness to transform us and change others for His glory?

Why does Paul emphasize the hope and power of the resurrection in 4:13-18? How do you balance the reality of our weakness with the hope of our resurrection? Why is this necessary within our Christian life?

Paul devotes time in 4:16-18 to the importance of perspective. What makes it difficult for you in this season of life to maintain an eternal perspective?

How does Paul's perspective on our bodies and on death compare to the perspective of our culture? How do we balance a proper emphasis on stewarding our bodies and caring for others while not making them an ultimate thing?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Paul unpacks the heart of his ministry in this chapter, using the image of reconciliation to do so. He begins by emphasizing the direction of the Christian life is not for ourselves but for Christ (5:11-15). He then

moves into an appeal for Christians to recognize the new nature (5:16-17), and hence their new ministry (5:18-21).

How are we tempted to live for ourselves and not for Christ? What idols pull on your heart so that your life is directed by the love of something other than Jesus?

How do we still judge people based on their appearances within the church? How is this completely out of step with the truth of all believers being part of God's new creation?

The truth that you are a new creation in Christ should change your identity. Yes, sin and death are still around you but your fundamental identity is that of being a new creation in Christ so that sin and death will not have victory over you (1 Cor 15). How can this truth change your current struggles with sin, suffering or shame?

Why do you think Paul uses the image of reconciliation in this passage to picture what God has done for us through Christ? Why is the language here that of reconciliation while in Romans it was justification? How might the language of righteousness (5:21) connect these ideas?

DAY 3 STUDY: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21

Today we will take time to practice a more contemplative reading approach to our passage.⁶

Preparation: Make sure that you are in a quiet place where you can be undisturbed. Quiet any noise. Turn off your phone, if possible. Put out of sight and mind your to-do list. Take a moment before reading to be still, to breathe deeply and come before the Lord, prayerfully laying your distractions and anxieties at His feet. Ask the Lord to speak to you so that you can be encouraged through His Word.

Listening: Read the entire passage without stopping. Read it a second time more slowly, writing down or underlining words, phrases or concepts that emerge from the passage. Read it a third time, visualizing key words, actions, or concepts from the passage. Prayerfully remember that God speaks through His Word and that this passage is for you and for your good. Ask God to help you see His truth in this reading.

Reflecting: Now look at the words you have highlighted and meditate on them. Imagine your own life being transformed or changed by the words of Scripture. Meditation will mean chewing on a word or phrase over and over again, using our minds to picture what it might look like for that word or phrase to be fully expressed in our life with God.

Praying: Pray the passage back to God. Your prayer may take many forms, including confession, praise, thanksgiving, or a cry for help.

Obeying: Prayerfully seek to discern how this passage will transform you in your choices, attitudes, or thoughts. Be open to specific promptings of obedience: a needed conversation with a friend, a confession to an offended party, an act of kindness towards someone.

⁶ This approach to reading Scripture is called *lectio divina*. The specific terminology used here is drawn from Richard Foster's work *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*, 62-72.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In many ways this letter is about ministry. How do the images Paul uses, e.g., an ambassador, a sacrifice (one who dies to bring life to others), inform, or fail to inform ministry at MBC?
2. For Paul ministry is a “two-way street,” a relationship of mutuality in which both parties are conduits of divine blessing. In what sense has this been true in your own life? How have you been blessed by the very people you were seeking to serve? How have you blessed those you have served?
3. How do desires for greed and power still show up within the church? How can we be on guard against these things in our own heart? How can we be a part of fostering healthy communities where desires for greed and power are uprooted?
4. How can Christians and churches who do not suffer persecution fully understand, appreciate, and affirm the promise of glory?
5. How does Paul’s image of reconciliation in chapter 5 shape our understanding of Christian life with God, with others, and with the world?
6. The subject of money does not always find a welcome home in church circles. What are some of the contemporary issues related to stewardship, and how might Paul’s cross shaped vision of grace and generosity inform our discussion of stewardship?
7. How are you, like Paul, spending and being spent for others?
8. What does it mean to practice “power in weakness” in the Christian life and in your serving of others? What are the challenges of living this way both inside the church and in the broader culture?
9. What does this letter urge the church, and you personally, to believe, to hope for, and to do?

COLOSSIANS

I AM FILLED IN CHRIST ALONE

Memory Verse: Colossians 1:9-10

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

Author: Paul & Timothy

Date: A.D. 61/62.

Place of Writing: Colossians, along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon are likely written from Rome during Paul's imprisonment while awaiting a hearing with the emperor as recorded in Acts 28.

Purpose: The letter to the Colossians was addressed to a church in the city of Colossae, approximately 100 miles east of Ephesus in what is now Turkey. Colossae was a more agricultural community as it was situated inland and away from seaports. Similar to the letter to the Romans, Paul is here writing to a congregation he does not personally know, and among whom he has not ministered directly. It is likely that the church began with Paul's Ephesian ministry (A.D. 52-55) during his third missionary journey. Paul writes the letter because of a report from his coworker Epaphras (1:8) who will giving an overall positive report of the church, also communicated to Paul the development of false teaching related both to the person of Christ and the practice of the Christian life (e.g., extreme asceticism & strict observance of special holy days). While the specific nature of this false teaching is unknown, elements of the so called "Colossian heresy" are addressed in chapter two of the letter (2:8, 9, 18, 20, 21, 23).

Outline:

Colossians 1:1-14: Greeting, Thanksgiving & Prayer

Colossians 1:15-23: The Preeminence of Christ

Colossians 1:24-2:5: Paul's Ministry

Colossians 2:6-23: Life in Christ, not in Philosophy

Colossians 3:1-4:6: Exhortations for Life in Christ

Colossians 4:7-18: Closing

Key Theme(s):

Christology: Throughout the letter Paul emphasizes the absolute superiority of Christ and exhorts believers to be rooted in Him so that they can live a full Christian life. Colossians 1:15-20 is a poetic exploration of the greatness of the Son, offering some of the most exalted language describing Jesus in the entire New Testament. While addressing the false teachers, Pauls' primary strategy is to emphasize the superiority of what Jesus has accomplished for through his death (2:14-15) and through our union with him (2:18-21).

Life in Christ: Paul's prayer in 1:9-12 contains in seed several themes that will grow throughout the rest of the book. The emphasis on Christ's exalted person is meant to draw attention to the nature of our life in Christ by virtue of our union with him (1:21-23; 2:11-12; 3:1-4). This life in Christ is primarily anchored then in our seeking to be filled with or allow to dwell within us the knowledge, peace, & word of Christ. Then out of the overflow of this life in and with God we are called to live in a way that is consistent with the character of our savior and his teachings (2:6-7; 3:1-2, 12-13)

Danger of Hersey: While details of the false teaching troubling the Colossians are lacking, they centered on two things. A denigration of the person and work of Christ, introducing the need for spiritual forces that work either in addition to Jesus, or in opposition to him. This denigration of Christ, leads naturally and necessarily then to the introduction of man centered rules for living a religious life. The danger in this alternative tradition and wisdom is that it would lead the Colossians church away from a foundation of *sola Christus* towards a "Jesus +" theology and spirituality.

DAY 1 STUDY: COLOSSIANS 1-4

Reading a large chunk of Scripture is a rewarding activity but can be challenging. Try to do the following before embarking on this journey.

- *Set aside a space in your day where you are able to read uninterrupted. It will take twenty to thirty minutes to read the letter to the Colossians and spend a few minutes reflecting on it.*
- *Decide whether you will read or listen. Listening to Colossians on an audio bible may be a great option. After all this letter was originally heard by a church.*
- *If you are reading, grab a writing utensil to star or underline verses or passages that stand out to you. If you are uncomfortable writing in your bible, use a journal to jot down verses that strike you as significant.*
- *Pray before you begin reading or listening. Ask God to guide your heart and mind to be encouraged, challenged, or convicted. Expect for God to be at work through this time.*

Read Colossians

Reflect on Colossians

1. *What words, or ideas stood out to you as you read/listened? Look back at your highlights or notes.*
2. *How do you see the heart of God being revealed through this letter?*
3. *What was encouraging/convicting to you?*
4. *What truths were you reminded of?*
5. *What calls to action stood out to you?*

Respond

Take time to pray and consider how God may be calling you to change your emotions, your thoughts, or your actions through this letter.

DAY 2 STUDY: COLOSSIANS 1:15-2:23

This section of Colossians will move from praise of the exalted Christ, through a consideration of Paul's ministry, and finally to addressing the false teaching troubling the church in Colossae.

Read Colossians 1:15-23

Paul offers an exalted view of Jesus and thus of what he has accomplished on our behalf in these verses.

Colossians presents Jesus as being God's agent of creation and the means of reconciliation for all things. It is through Jesus that all things are made right. In what ways, if any is the sufficiency of Christ as God's agent of creation and reconciliation challenged today? How does, and how should, the church respond to these challenges?

How might the opening poem of Colossians (1:15-20), as well as the letter as a whole, prompt Christians today to understand and act on the universal lordship of Christ and the cosmic scope of his reconciling work?

Read Colossians 1:24-2:5

How would you summarize Paul's ministry as expressed in these verses? What are two or three of his overarching goals? What do these goals look like in 21st century West Texas instead of 1st century Asia Minor?

Read Colossians 2:6-15

Does Paul's rejection of "philosophy" render all intellectual or nontheological study pointless, or even harmful? What kind of attitude toward culture might this notion foster?

What should our attitude towards culture be in light of Colossians?

How does our being united to Christ serve as the answer to the challenges the Colossians are facing?

Read Colossians 2:16-23

What kinds of supplemental – but ultimately inappropriate – spiritual practices and experiences do people sometimes attempt to impose on Christians today? What might be their motivations? What is the appeal of such rules or experiences?

What kind of perspectives on spiritual disciplines such as fasting might the critique of extreme asceticism in Colossians generate?

How do we balance the good practice of spiritual disciplines with the pull of legalism and man-made religiosity on our hearts?

DAY 3 STUDY: COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

Today we will take time to practice a more contemplative reading approach to our passage.⁷

Preparation: Make sure that you are in a quiet place where you can be undisturbed. Quiet any noise. Turn off your phone, if possible. Put out of sight and mind your to-do list. Take a moment before reading to be still, to breathe deeply and come before the Lord, prayerfully laying your distractions and anxieties at His feet. Ask the Lord to speak to you so that you can be encouraged through His Word.

Listening: Read the entire passage without stopping. Read it a second time more slowly, writing down or underlining words, phrases or concepts that emerge from the passage. Read it a third time, visualizing key words, actions, or concepts from the passage. Prayerfully remember that God speaks through His Word and that this passage is for you and for your good. Ask God to help you see His truth in this reading.

Reflecting: Now look at the words you have highlighted and meditate on them. Imagine your own life being transformed or changed by the words of Scripture. Meditation will mean chewing on a word or phrase over and over again, using our minds to picture what it might look like for that word or phrase to be fully expressed in our life with God.

Praying: Pray the passage back to God. Your prayer may take many forms, including confession, praise, thanksgiving, or a cry for help.

Obeying: Prayerfully seek to discern how this passage will transform you in your choices, attitudes, or thoughts. Be open to specific promptings of obedience: a needed conversation with a friend, a confession to an offended party, an act of kindness towards someone.

⁷ This approach to reading Scripture is called *lectio divina*. The specific terminology used here is drawn from Richard Foster's work *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*, 62-72.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do people today experience the world as either a safe or a hostile place? To what benevolent or malevolent power(s) do those of other faiths (and some Christians!) ascribe their good or bad fortunes?
2. How does Colossians help us understand the reality of physical and spiritual forces at work against God's plans and purposes? How does Colossians comfort Christians and give us confidence in the face of opposition and attack from powers (physical and spiritual)?
3. What significance do (or could) the metaphors of "being raised with Christ" and "putting on Christ" have for the contemporary church? Why is it important to keep these metaphors connected to the cross?
4. What are the contemporary sins associated with sex and speech that modern believers should "put to death" – and why?
5. How might the gospel as it is related in Colossians impact family life in our day?
6. What is the church's responsibility in assisting its members to be prepared to share their faith with others?
7. What does this letter urge the church, and you personally, to believe, to hope for, and to do?

EPHESIANS

I AM IN CHRIST

Memory Verse: Ephesians 2:8-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 61/62

Place of Writing: Rome

Purpose:⁸ Ephesians, more than any other Pauline epistle, seems to lack a clear and urgent situation to which it is responding. The exhortations and themes seem more general than they do specific, and the letter does not address by name anyone in Ephesus. Added to this uniqueness is the fact that several early manuscripts do not include the phrase “in Ephesus” in 1:1 making it possible that the letter was a circular letter written to Christians in a general area of Asia Minor. Despite this possibility, the unanimous opinion of the early church as well as the witness of most manuscripts make Ephesus the most likely destination. The letter itself reflects an Ephesian setting, addressing topics relevant to new believers from a Gentile background including the nature of our life in Christ, the unity of the body of Christ, the need to walk in love, and the victory of the believer in Christ over cosmic forces of evil.

Outline:

Ephesians 1-3: The Grace of God Transforms our Identity

Ephesians 4-6: The Grace of God Transforms our Way of Life

Key Theme(s):

The Greatness & Grace of God: The letter to the Ephesians presents a grand and sweeping vision of God’s plan of salvation. The opening half of the letter lays out God’s eternal plan for believers personally and as a community. This grand sweeping plan of God is what has sometimes been called the *mission Dei* or Mission of God and lays out the heart of

⁸ For a more detailed discussion see C. E. Arnold, “EPHESIANS, LETTER TO THE,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 246.

all God's plans and purposes for his world. At the heart of this plan is the grace of God given to us in and through the person of Jesus Christ. The Spirit, given to us now is the guarantee of our ultimate and final participation in God's glorious, eternal kingdom.

The Status & Walk of the Believer: Throughout the opening half of the letter the believer's identity as being "in Christ"⁹ is emphasized to draw attention to the way our identity and position before God has shifted because of the grace we have received. Throughout the second half of the letter the emphasis shifts to the way in which God's grace through the indwelling power of the Spirit transforms the way we live in relationship to one another, to the world, and to spiritual forces that might oppose us. Paul lays out a vision of a transformed life in which the believer's move from darkness to light alters every facet of their life as we seek to live a life worthy of our calling (4:1). Included within this discussion of the walk of the believer is the reality of our engaging in spiritual warfare with powers and principalities (6:10-20). What is sometimes forgotten is that the pinnacle of this section on spiritual warfare is a summons to prayer and proclamation of the gospel.

The Church: Arguably no letter draws more attention to the nature and function of the church within God's purposes and plans for the world. The emphasis on the unity of the church underscores the nature of our new identity in Christ. This unity is grounded not in human markers of race, ethnicity, or nationality but in the supernatural unity of the Spirit (4:3-6).

⁹ This prepositional phrase is used 12x in the opening three chapters of the book.

DAY 1 STUDY: EPHESIANS 1-6

Reading a large chunk of Scripture is a rewarding activity but can be challenging. Try to do the following before embarking on this journey.

- *Set aside time in your day where you are likely able to read and reflect for an extended period of time. It will likely take a little over half an hour to read Ephesians and reflect on it.*
- *Decide whether you will read or listen. Listening to Ephesians on an audio bible may be a great option. After all this letter was originally heard by a church.*
- *If you are reading grab a writing utensil to star or underline verses or passages that stand out to you. If you are uncomfortable writing in your bible, use a journal to jot down verses that strike you as significant.*
- *Pray before you begin reading or listening. Ask God to guide your heart and mind to be encouraged, challenged, or convicted. Expect for God to be at work through this time.*

Read Ephesians

Reflect on Ephesians

1. *What words, or ideas stood out to you as you read/listened? Look back at your highlights or notes.*
2. *How do you see the heart of God being revealed through this letter?*
3. *What was encouraging/convicting to you?*
4. *What truths were you reminded of?*
5. *What calls to action stood out to you?*

Respond

Take time to pray and consider how God may be calling you to change your emotions, your thoughts, or your actions through this letter.

DAY 2 STUDY: EPHESIANS 4

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

Paul opens the second half of his letter with a discussion of the oneness of the body of Christ. This unity comes about as we together strive to walk worthy of the calling with which we have been called and is grounded in the work of God.

Note the similarity between the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 and the characteristics listed in 4:2. Why do you think Paul first exhorts the Ephesians to live with these qualities as a goal before exhorting to unity?

What major divisions among people are found today within society and the church? How might the divine plan for reconciliation and unity among Gentiles and Jews speak to these divisions?

What can Ephesians contribute to our contemporary attempts to define the ministry of the body of Christ?

Read Ephesians 4:17-32

The second half of this chapter emphasizes the distinctiveness of this new life in Christ that we have. The grace that we receive is a transforming grace.

Why is speech a matter for theological and spiritual consideration as it is prominently in Ephesians? Is there a need in the contemporary church for more careful attention to the theology and practice of speech?

What does it look like practically to become increasingly sanctified in our emotions?

What if any is the significance of forgiveness concluding this section?

Which of the exhortations in 4:25-32 is most challenging to you and why?

DAY 3 STUDY: EPHESIANS 2:8-10

Today we will take time to practice a more contemplative reading approach to our passage.¹⁰

Preparation: Make sure that you are in a quiet place where you can be undisturbed. Quiet any noise. Turn off your phone, if possible. Put out of sight and mind your to-do list. Take a moment before reading to be still, to breathe deeply and come before the Lord, prayerfully laying your distractions and anxieties at His feet. Ask the Lord to speak to you so that you can be encouraged through His Word.

Listening: Read the entire passage without stopping. Read it a second time more slowly, writing down or underlining words, phrases or concepts that emerge from the passage. Read it a third time, visualizing key words, actions, or concepts from the passage. Prayerfully remember that God speaks through His Word and that this passage is for you and for your good. Ask God to help you see His truth in this reading.

Reflecting: Now look at the words you have highlighted and meditate on them. Imagine your own life being transformed or changed by the words of Scripture. Meditation will mean chewing on a word or phrase over and over again, using our minds to picture what it might look like for that word or phrase to be fully expressed in our life with God.

Praying: Pray the passage back to God. Your prayer may take many forms, including confession, praise, thanksgiving, or a cry for help.

¹⁰ This approach to reading Scripture is called *lectio divina*. The specific terminology used here is drawn from Richard Foster's work *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*, 62-72.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Ephesians presents the believer in Christ as being already seated with Christ in heaven, a position of exaltation and victory. What are the strengths, as well as the possible dangers, of a theology that stress present resurrection and exaltation with Christ? What, if anything, does Ephesians offer to help keep such dangers in check?
2. What might the first half of Ephesians 2 contribute to the centuries-old debate about "faith and works"?
3. In what areas of life does the church need to be more distinct from its 'pagan' culture? How is the holiness of the church related to the mission of the church?
4. In your experience, how has the household code (5:22-6:9) been used in discussions of marriage and family life? How do the general overarching principles of 4:1-2, 20-24; 5:1-2 shape our understanding of marriage and family life as well?
5. What value might the image of "spiritual" or "cosmic" warfare have for the church today? How might it be misunderstood or misused?
6. What does this letter urge the church to believe, to hope for, and to do?

GALATIANS

I AM FREE ONLY IN CHRIST

Memory Verse: Galatians 5:13

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

Author: Paul is the only author listed by name, although he does mention that the letter is from other believers who are with him as well (Gal 1:2). This appeal to a community standing behind the exhortation is likely because of the contentious and significant issues addressed in the letter. Paul wants the Galatian believers to know that an entire community of believers stands behind what is said in the letter as a way of furthering the impact of his appeal.

Date: A.D. 48. Galatians is universally regarded as one of Paul's earliest epistles, although there is some debate over the exact date and whether it was his first letter. At the heart of this debate is the question of whether Paul writes Galatians before the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 49/50) recorded in Acts 15. The argument for the early date proposed here rests on the assumption that Paul would have referenced the decision reached in Jerusalem by the apostles in Acts 15. However, Paul nowhere makes clear reference to those events thus a date prior to the Council and between the first and second missionary journeys is proposed.

Place of Writing: If what is said above holds, Galatians was likely written from Antioch in Syria, Paul's home base for missions activity.

Purpose: Galatians is written to defend the gospel preached by Paul, resisting all attempts to supplement the work of Christ in the Christian life. Galatians is the charter of Christian freedom, a freedom found in embracing a crucified Savior.

Outline:¹¹

Galatians 1-2: The Gospel of Christ: Justification as Crucifixion and Resurrection with the Messiah

¹¹ Adapted from Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 238.

Galatians 3-4: The Promise of the Father: The Better Promises of Scripture

Galatians 5-6: The Freedom of the Spirit: The Life of Faith & Love

Theme(s):

Justification: The concept of justification in Scripture is connected to righteousness (both English words have the same Greek stem). Justification involves God declaring the believer righteous in Christ. This declaration involves God taking our sin and placing it upon Christ and then crediting Christ's righteousness to our account. This is what is called the double imputation: our sin imputed to Christ; His righteousness imputed to us. Justification is naturally connected to reconciliation and transformation as well. Our being declared righteous fundamentally shifts the nature of our relationship with God, and this shift in relationship with God naturally leads to transformation. This is a part of why a letter that strongly emphasizes justification in its opening, is naturally led to discuss the freedom of the Christian life.

Freedom: Galatians has been called the "Charter of Christian Liberty" as it lays out the joyous Spirit-led life God desires for all those who are justified. The freedom experienced by the Christian is found in our no longer being a slave to sin, or bound to the law, but instead to our belonging to Christ and the freedom of walking by the Spirit. It is a freedom whose goal is serving one another humbly in love (Gal 5:13).

Faith: The work of Jesus is the objective grounds of our justification, while our response of faith is the subjective grounds of participating in and receiving Christ's life.¹²

The Law: It is important to recognize that Paul's polemic in the letter is not against the Old Testament per se, but against the interpretation and practice of the Old Testament espoused by the Judaizers. Paul's argument is not against Moses but against a corruption of Moses.

¹² Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 248.

DAY 1 STUDY: GALATIANS 1-6

Reading a large chunk of Scripture is a rewarding activity but can be challenging. Try to do the following before embarking on this journey.

- *Set aside one or more spaces in your day, where you are likely going to be able to read. It will likely take a little over half an hour to read Galatians and spend a few minutes reflecting on it.*
- *Decide whether you will read or listen. Listening to Galatians on an audio bible may be a great option. After all this letter was originally heard by a church.*
- *If you are reading grab a writing utensil to star or underline verses or passages that stand out to you. If you are uncomfortable writing in your bible, use a journal to jot down verses that strike you as significant.*
- *Pray before you begin reading or listening. Ask God to guide your heart and mind to be encouraged, challenged, or convicted. Expect for God to be at work through this time.*

Read Galatians

Reflect on Galatians

1. *What words, or ideas stood out to you as you read/listened? Look back at your highlights or notes.*
2. *How do you see the heart of God being revealed through this letter?*
3. *What was encouraging/convicting to you?*
4. *What truths were you reminded of?*
5. *What calls to action stood out to you?*

Respond

Take time to pray and consider how God may be calling you to change your emotions, your thoughts, or your actions through this letter.

DAY 2: GALATIANS 5

This final section of the letter explores the freedom that believers have in Christ and the nature of life in the Spirit.

Read Galatians 5:1-12

How can freedom become an excuse for "the flesh," for license, for immorality, or for irresponsibility in the Christian life?

The Galatians were tempted to supplement faith in Christ with circumcision. How are Christians in the 21st century in Midland tempted to supplement their faith in Christ alone?

What contributions does Galatians make to, and what questions might it raise about, a contemporary understanding of Christian freedom?

Read Galatians 5:13-26

How is true freedom found in loving service to others? Why is the paradox of freedom being found in serving others so challenging to us?

Life in Christ involves walking by the Spirit, crucifying the flesh and its passions, keeping in step with the Spirit so that the fruit of the Spirit grows within us. How have you seen the fruit of the Spirit produced in your life?

What does it look like practically for you to crucify the flesh?

What does it look like practically to walk by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit?

DAY 3: GALATIANS 2:17-21

Today we will take time to practice a more contemplative reading approach to our passage.¹³

Preparation: Make sure that you are in a quiet place where you can be undisturbed. Quiet any noise. Turn off your phone, if possible. Put out of sight and mind your to-do list. Take a moment before reading to be still, to breathe deeply and come before the Lord, prayerfully laying your distractions and anxieties at His feet. Ask the Lord to speak to you so that you can be encouraged through His Word.

Listening: Read the entire passage without stopping. Read it a second time more slowly, writing down or underlining words, phrases or concepts that emerge from the passage. Read it a third time, visualizing key words, actions, or concepts from the passage. Prayerfully remember that God speaks through His Word and that this passage is for you and for your good. Ask God to help you see His truth in this reading.

Reflecting: Now look at the words you have highlighted and meditate on them. Imagine your own life being transformed or changed by the words of Scripture. Meditation will mean chewing on a word or phrase over and over again, using our minds to picture what it might look like for that word or phrase to be fully expressed in our life with God.

Praying: Pray the passage back to God. Your prayer may take many forms, including confession, praise, thanksgiving, or a cry for help.

Obeying: Prayerfully seek to discern how this passage will transform you in your choices, attitudes, or thoughts. Be open to specific promptings of obedience: a needed conversation with a friend, a confession to an offended party, an act of kindness towards someone.

¹³ This approach to reading Scripture is called *lectio divina*. The specific terminology used here is drawn from Richard Foster's work *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*, 62-72.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In Galatians, Paul expresses significant passion – anger, disappointment, confidence, etc. What kinds of criteria might be necessary for the appropriate expression of such emotions in the context of church life?
2. What kinds of “supplements” to the gospel of Christ crucified and the fit of the Spirit have been, or are currently being introduced into the church?
3. What causes people and movements to try to supplement the gospel?
4. In what ways might Galatians help in identifying and addressing such supplements?
5. How are the cross of Christ and are being crucified with Christ, connected to the freedom of the Spirit and our life in the Spirit?
6. What is the contemporary significance of Paul’s claim that in Christ there is “no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female”?
7. In what ways do contemporary Christians separate faith and love, or theology and ethics? How might Galatians assist the church in keeping them together?
8. How does the tension between individual and communal responsibility in bearing burdens manifest itself in the church today?
9. What does this letter urge the church and you personally to believe, to hope for, and to do?

TITUS

**I AM CALLED TO
GODLINESS IN
CHRIST**

Memory Verse:

Titus 3:5

*He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done,
but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing
of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*

INTRODUCTION TO TITUS

Author: Paul. The apostle is the only person mentioned at the opening of the letter, unlike in several other letters where the opening greeting indicates a level of collaboration with other members of Paul's circle.

Date: A.D. 62 – 64. The letter is likely written after Paul's release from imprisonment in Rome which began at the end of the book of Acts. Paul was released and according to early church history proceeded with mission work for 2-3 years before a second imprisonment during the reign of Nero resulted in his beheading. See the appendix for a more complete timeline of the apostle Paul's life.

Place of Writing: Nicopolis is the most likely place of writing. Nicopolis, a city on the western coast of Greece, is mentioned in 3:12 as the place where Paul has decided to winter. It is unclear however, if this is indicating a future destination for the apostle, or his current location where he will remain throughout the winter.

Purpose: The letter is written from Paul to his trusted coworker Titus, whom has been left on Crete to finish the work that Paul had left undone and appoint elders in the churches (1:5). The letter to Titus then expresses a vision for the ordering of church life, both in terms of its elders/leadership, as well as the godliness that ought to permeate the life of individual Christians and the community as a whole.

Outline:

- *Introduction: 1:1-4*
- *The Leadership of the Church: 1:5-16*
 - *Qualifications for Elders: 1:5-9*
 - *Rebuking False Teachers: 1:10-16*
- *The Godliness of the Church: 2:1-3:11*
 - *Instructions for Specific Groups: 2:1-10*
 - *Instructions for a Godly Life: 2:11-3:11*
- *Closing: 3:12-15*

Theme(s):

Ordering the Life of the Church: The letter to Titus is one of two places in the New Testament where the qualifications for elders/overseers is outlined by the Apostle Paul, the other being 1 Timothy. What is interesting to note is that the list in Titus, while similar is less demanding than that in 1 Timothy. This may reflect that while godly character and the ability to instruct others in the basics of the faith are required, there may be other qualifications (like the length of time since conversion, or age) that are more situationally governed.

The Godly Life of the Church: The character of the church's leaders is paramount because the church, as the body of Christ itself, is called to a life of godliness. Titus 2 outlines the way in which our new life in Christ ought to transform every walk of life. God's grace is transforming grace that calls into a new way to live.

New Life Between the Advents: The letter to Titus emphasizes this new life in Christ exists between the first and second comings of Christ. For Paul, this existence in the between times is one in which the renewal and new birth brought about through our justification is intended to lead to a life of godliness which brings good to those around us (3:4-8).

DAY 1 STUDY: TITUS 1-3

Reading a large chunk of Scripture is a rewarding activity but can be challenging. Try to do the following before embarking on this journey.

- *Set aside one or more spaces in your day, where you are likely going to be able to read. It will take less than half an hour to read the book and spend a few minutes reflecting on it.*
- *Decide whether you will read or listen. Listening to 1 Corinthians on an audio bible may be a great option. After all this letter was originally heard by a church.*
- *If you are reading grab a writing utensil to star or underline verses or passages that stand out to you. If you are uncomfortable writing in your bible, use a journal to jot down verses that strike you as significant.*
- *Pray before you begin reading or listening. Ask God to guide your heart and mind to be encouraged, challenged, or convicted. Expect for God to be at work through this time.*

Read Titus

Reflect on Titus

1. *What words, or ideas stood out to you as you read/listened? Look back at your highlights or notes.*
2. *How do you see the heart of God being revealed through this letter?*
3. *What was encouraging/convicting to you?*
4. *What truths were you reminded of?*
5. *What calls to action stood out to you?*

Respond

Take time to pray and consider how God may be calling you to change your emotions, your thoughts, or your actions through this letter.

DAY 2 STUDY: TITUS 2:11-3:11

Read Titus 2:11-14

Notice that the word “appear” occurs in two different forms once in vs. 11 & and the other in vs. 13. Paul situations the entire Christian life in this time between the first appearance of Christ (his death & resurrection) and the second appearance of Christ (his return). In other words, Titus emphasizes the free and gracious salvation that God has brought to us (vs. 11), before reminding us of the implications of that salvation for godly living now (vs. 12), while we wait for our glorious hope (vs. 13).

How does your faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus change the way you live today?

Why do you think Paul emphasizes the characteristics of denial, self-control, and godliness, in describing our life as Christians?

How does our future hope inform our living today?

Read Titus 2:15-3:2

Why do you think Paul emphasizes obedience to rulers?

How does our relationship to authority and to the communities where we live influence our gospel witness?

Read Titus 3:3-8

Why is it important to remember that Titus 3:3 is an accurate description of all of us before coming to faith in Christ? How can Christians who grew up in a Christian home and trusted Christ at an early age sometimes not realize the depths of their own depravity and need for Christ?

Why do you think Paul uses the imagery of washing and renewal when he talks about the work of Jesus in saving us? How do these

metaphors unpack the effects of sin and also the power of the good news?

What is our new position in Christ according to Titus 3:7? How does this contrast with the before outlined in Titus 3:3?

What does good, sound teaching lead to in 3:8?

Read Titus 3:9-11

What does unsound teaching lead to in these verses? How does the end result of foolish teaching in these verses contrast with the goal of good teaching in 3:8?

What is the connection between character and doctrine?

DAY 3 STUDY: TITUS 2:11-15

Today we will take time to practice a more contemplative reading approach to our passage.¹⁴

Preparation: Make sure that you are in a quiet place where you can be undisturbed. Quiet any noise. Turn off your phone, if possible. Put out of sight and mind your to-do list. Take a moment before reading to be still, to breathe deeply and come before the Lord, prayerfully laying your distractions and anxieties at His feet. Ask the Lord to speak to you so that you can be encouraged through His Word.

Listening: Read the entire passage without stopping. Read it a second time more slowly, writing down or underlining words, phrases or concepts that emerge from the passage. Read it a third time, visualizing key words, actions, or concepts from the passage. Prayerfully remember that God speaks through His Word and that this passage is for you and for your good. Ask God to help you see His truth in this reading.

Reflecting: Now look at the words you have highlighted and meditate on them. Imagine your own life being transformed or changed by the words of Scripture. Meditation will mean chewing on a word or phrase over and over again, using our minds to picture what it might look like for that word or phrase to be fully expressed in our life with God.

Praying: Pray the passage back to God. Your prayer may take many forms, including confession, praise, thanksgiving, or a cry for help.

Obeying: Prayerfully seek to discern how this passage will transform you in your choices, attitudes, or thoughts. Be open to specific promptings of obedience: a needed conversation with a friend, a confession to an offended party, an act of kindness towards someone.

¹⁴ This approach to reading Scripture is called *lectio divina*. The specific terminology used here is drawn from Richard Foster's work *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*, 62-72.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Throughout Paul's epistles the virtues of faith, hope, and love stand as primary. How do you think Paul would have defined these virtues?
2. Are their values within our 21st century culture that are close to these Pauline virtues and can be appropriated by Christians?
3. Are there values within our culture today that are antithetical to Paul's triad of faith, hope, and love? If so, what do we
4. What is the first coming of Christ? What is the second coming of Christ?
5. The first and second coming of Christ can also be called his advents, or epiphanies. What is the significance of living between these life changing moments?
6. If the church is called to reach the world, then how we structure our local churches and how we live as brothers and sisters will impact our witness in our community and around the world. What does our life say about our witness?
7. How do we determine what rises to the level of false teaching/heresy? How do we refute false teaching today?
8. What does this letter urge the church and you personally to believe, to hope for, and to do?

APPENDIX

A CHRONOLOGY OF PAUL'S LIFE

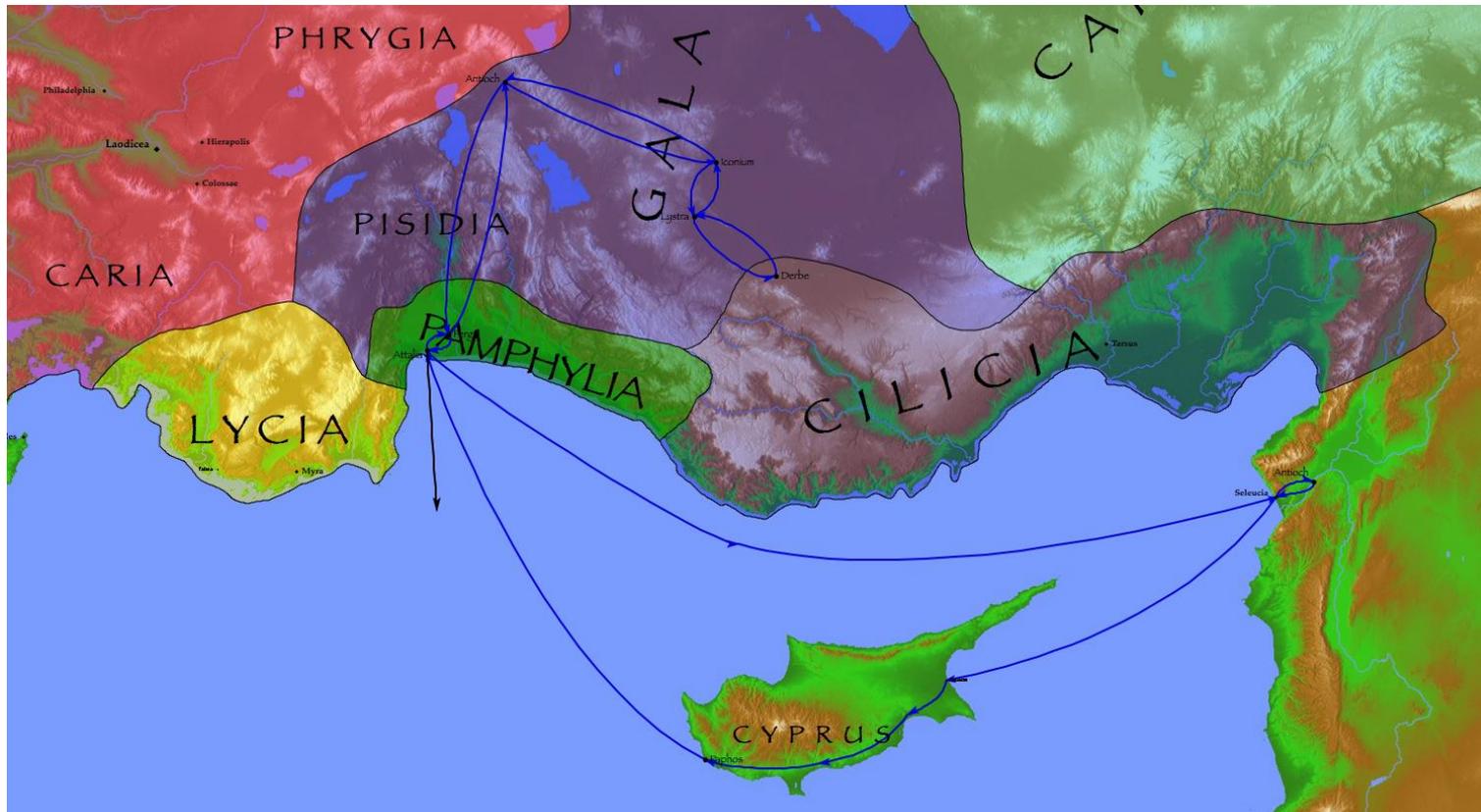
The dates below are approximate both for Paul's life and ministry as well as the exact date of writing for his letters. All dates are A.D.

Date	Event	Scriptural References
By 10 A.D.	Birth in Tarsus	
10 – 30	Education first in Tarsus then Jerusalem	
30 – 33	Persecution of Christians	1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:6; Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2
33	Call & Conversion on the Damascus Road	Gal 1:15-16; Acts 9:22-26; Phil 3:3-11
33 – 36	Paul in Damascus & Arabia	Gal 1:17
36	First Jerusalem visit: two weeks with Cephas & James	Gal 1:18-24; Acts 9:26-29
36 – 46	Early mission work in Syria, Cilicia & Antioch	Gal 1:21; Acts 9:30
46	Second Jerusalem Visit: Famine relief from Antioch	Acts 11:30; Gal 2:1-10
47-48	First Missionary Journey: Cyprus & Asia Minor (South Galatia)	Acts 13-14
48	<i>Paul writes Galatians</i>	
48/49	Jerusalem Council	Acts 15
49 – 52	Second Missionary Journey: Greece, including Philippi & Thessalonica	Acts 16 - 18

	before staying in Corinth for 18 months	
51-52	<i>Paul writes 1 & 2 Thessalonians</i>	
52	Quick visit to Jerusalem & Antioch	Acts 18:22
52-57	Third Missionary Journey: Three years in Ephesus, followed by visits to Macedonia & Corinth before journeying back to Jerusalem	Acts 19-20
53	<i>Paul writes 1 Corinthians</i>	
56	<i>Paul writes 2 Corinthians</i>	
57	<i>Paul writes Romans</i>	
57	Arrest in Jerusalem	Acts 21-23
57-59	Imprisonment in Caesarea	Acts 23-26
59-60	Journey to Rome	Acts 27-28
60-62	Imprisonment in Rome	Acts 28
61-62	<i>Paul writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon</i>	
62 - 65	Release from Rome and further mission work	
62-64	<i>Paul writes 1 Timothy & Titus</i>	
65	<i>Paul writes 2 Timothy</i>	
65	Death	

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

Paul's First Missionary Journey



On his first missionary journey, Paul (blue line) traveled with Barnabas to Cyprus and throughout southeastern Asia Minor (Acts 12:25–14:28). John Mark (black line), who had been accompanying them, turned back from the mission in Pamphylia (Acts 15:36–38).

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



On Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22), he took Silas with him through the interior of Asia Minor and eventually into Macedonia and Greece (white line), Barnabas took John Mark with him to Cyprus (blue line).

Paul's Third Missionary Journey



On Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:16), he stayed in Ephesus for several years before he was forced to flee to Macedonia (blue line). Timothy and Erastus (white line) eventually sailed to meet him. They traveled throughout Macedonia, Greece, and the Ionian coast raising money for the poor in Jerusalem. He successfully delivered the offering to Jerusalem but was arrested shortly thereafter.

Paul's Journey to Rome



Paul is arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27-36) and then transferred to Caesarea (Acts 23:23-35) where he is held for over two years (Acts 24-26; esp. 24:24-27). After that he is transported by ship, first to Asia Minor (Acts 27:1-8) and then on towards Crete (Acts 27:9-12). However, due to a storm the ship is driven off course and crashes on Malta (Acts 27:13-44). After a three month stay, they sail towards Rome and land at Syracuse (Acts 28:1-12) before finishing the journey to Rome by land (Acts 28:13-16).

THE RECIPIENTS OF PAUL'S LETTERS



This map shows the location and approximate dates of writing for Paul's letters. Dates divided by a forward slash "/" or dash "-" indicate uncertainty regarding the exact date of the letter. Ampersands and semicolons dividing dates indicate multiple letters received by that city. Ephesus was possibly the recipient of three letters, Ephesians as well as 1 & 2 Timothy. Titus was written to the figure of that name while ministering on the island of Crete.

THE PLACE OF WRITING FOR PAUL'S LETTERS



Paul wrote letters from at least five different locations. The place of writing for 1 Timothy, Titus is unknown if we assume that they were written after Paul's release from prison in Rome in AD 62 but sometime before his subsequent imprisonment around AD 65. Paul likely wrote five letters from Rome, three from Corinth, and one each from Philippi, Ephesus & Antioch.