

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Christ in You

A verse-by-verse adult Bible study of Colossians · ten sessions

SESSION ONE	Faith, Love, and Hope	<i>Colossians 1:1–14</i>
SESSION TWO	He Is the Image of the Invisible God	<i>Colossians 1:15–23</i>
SESSION THREE	Christ in You, the Hope of Glory	<i>Colossians 1:24–2:5</i>
SESSION FOUR	Rooted and Built Up in Him	<i>Colossians 2:6–15</i>
SESSION FIVE	Let No One Pass Judgment on You	<i>Colossians 2:16–23</i>
SESSION SIX	Seek the Things That Are Above	<i>Colossians 3:1–11</i>
SESSION SEVEN	Put On Love	<i>Colossians 3:12–17</i>
SESSION EIGHT	In the Lord	<i>Colossians 3:18–4:1</i>
SESSION NINE	Walk in Wisdom	<i>Colossians 4:2–6</i>
SESSION TEN	Remember My Chains	<i>Colossians 4:7–18</i>



By Larry Herzog Jr. · companion to *Christ in You*, volume three of The Pauline Captivity Letters

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SESSION ONE

Faith, Love, and Hope

Colossians 1:1–14 · Introducing the Letter to the Colossians

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session One of *Christ in You*. You are beginning a ten-session study of Paul's letter to the Colossians — the third of the four captivity letters this series walks through, and the most theologically compressed of them. This guide exists to help you teach each session with confidence.

What you hold is a companion to the main Bible study book. The book itself is written for the student — a reader who will engage the chapter, look up the passages in his or her own Bible, and come to class prepared to discuss. This guide is written for you — the person responsible for shaping that hour of teaching and conversation.

Your class may be mixed in a way the earlier volumes' classes were not. Some students will arrive having walked through Ephesians in *In Christ* or Philippians in *To Live Is Christ*; others will be opening their first captivity letter. Both groups are well served by this session, because Colossians stands on its own feet — but you should know from the outset which students carry the series frame already and which are receiving it fresh. For the alumni, this letter is the third dispatch from the same Roman house arrest, written at the same desk, and Session Ten will finally pay off a promise the first volume made in passing — the courier who carried these letters, and the runaway slave who traveled with him. For the newcomers, today establishes everything they need: a chained apostle, a church he never met, and a gospel already bearing fruit.

One temptation to resist from the start. Colossians is famous for its Christ-hymn, and some of your students will arrive wanting to go there immediately — *the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation*. Assure them it is coming, next week, with the slow walking it deserves. But the student book deliberately begins at the address, and the address is not throat-clearing. If your students leave today knowing that this letter comes from chains by the will of God, that the Colossians hold two addresses at once, and that salvation arrives in this letter as five perfect-tense verbs — already accomplished, all of it gift — they will be prepared for everything that follows.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Before a word of cosmic Christology is spoken, Paul frames the whole letter in fourteen verses of gift — an apostle in chains by the will of God, a church he never visited and a founder no one famous, believers who live *in Christ* and *at Colossae* at the same time, a gospel that bears fruit wherever it goes, and five perfect-tense verbs announcing a salvation already accomplished; establish today that everything in Colossians grows from this seed, and the whole study stands on it.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Session One of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ◆ Read Colossians in one sitting. It takes about a quarter of an hour — it is barely half the length of Ephesians. The student book will spend ten weeks in the parts; you should begin with a feel for the whole.
- ◆ Mark the five perfect-tense verbs in 1:12–14 — *qualified, delivered, transferred, have redemption, forgiveness of sins*. They are the destination of this session's teaching hour, and you will want them in your bones before you stand up.
- ◆ Read Acts 19:1–10 — Paul's long ministry in Ephesus, daily teaching in the hall of Tyrannus, from which *all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord*. Colossae is in Asia. This is how a church Paul never visited came to exist, and the student book leans on it.
- ◆ Review the Small Catechism's Table of Duties, even briefly. The session's quiet centerpiece — saints and faithful brothers *in Christ at Colossae*, two addresses held at once — is Luther's doctrine of vocation in miniature, and you will want the connection close at hand.
- ◆ Pray. Ten weeks is a long walk with a congregation through one letter. Commit the study to the Lord's keeping from the start.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ◆ Your Bible, and ideally copies of the student book for any students who do not yet have one.
- ◆ A map showing the Lycus valley and the province of Asia. Any basic Bible atlas will have one. Students need to see three towns clustered in the valley — Colossae,

Laodicea, Hierapolis — and Ephesus sitting on the coast a hundred miles west. The geography is the story of how this church was born.

- ◆ A whiteboard or flip chart. Today you will start the visual that will carry the whole study: the student book says of this opening passage that *everything is here, in seed form*, and names the themes Paul plants — the supremacy of Christ, the sufficiency of his work, the new life of those who belong to him, the hope laid up in heaven, the faithful labor of handing the gospel on. Write SEEDS at the top and list them. Every week of this study you will return to the list and mark which seeds are flowering in that session's text. Kept alive across ten sessions, this single visual will teach the letter's unity better than any lecture.
- ◆ Optional: a postal change-of-address form, or any piece of mail with a forwarding label. When you reach *transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son*, the image of changed papers makes the verb concrete — the believer's visible address says Colossae; his deeper papers say the kingdom of Christ.
- ◆ Name tags if you have new students.

Knowing Your Class

Different classes will bring different backgrounds to Colossians. A few patterns to anticipate:

- ◆ Veterans of the earlier volumes will recognize the opening moves — a greeting from prison, a thanksgiving, a long prayer — and may be tempted to coast on the familiarity. Put the family resemblance to work instead of letting it dull the room: this is the same imprisonment, the same desk, even some of the same sentences, written to a church in the opposite condition — Ephesus knew Paul for years; Colossae never saw his face.
- ◆ Lifelong Lutherans may carry a verse or two of Colossians from confirmation — *set your minds on things that are above*, perhaps the warning against *philosophy and empty deceit* — without ever having read the letter as one sustained pastoral document. Some will also have heard Colossians described as Paul's answer to a heresy and will expect a polemical study. Let today gently correct the expectation: the letter opens not with an attack but with thanksgiving, and the study will keep that order.
- ◆ Students from evangelical backgrounds may instinctively supply a human contribution when salvation is discussed — a decision, a commitment, a qualifying act of faith. Do not engage this head-on today; simply teach the five verbs the way Paul wrote them, with God as the agent of every one. Session Four, where Paul grounds it all in Baptism, will do the heavier work. Note privately which students may need care when it arrives.
- ◆ Students from small congregations in small towns — which, in our circles, is many of them — will find this session unexpectedly personal. Colossae was a town past its

peak, outstripped by its neighbors, never visited by an apostle, its church planted by an ordinary local convert. For students who quietly wonder whether anything significant can happen in a place like theirs, today's text is an answer. Watch the room when you teach it.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and introduction to the study
0:05–0:12	An apostle in chains, by the will of God (v. 1)
0:12–0:19	Colossae and Epaphras: a church Paul never met
0:19–0:27	Saints and faithful brothers: the two addresses (v. 2)
0:27–0:34	Faith, love, and hope — and the order they come in (vv. 3–5)
0:34–0:41	The word that bears fruit; the prayer for walking (vv. 5–12)
0:41–0:49	Qualified, delivered, transferred (vv. 12–14) — the heart
0:49–0:54	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:54–0:58	What are you hoping for? — a recorded round
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 2 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

The five perfect-tense verbs of verses 12–14 are the heart of the session, and the two addresses of verse 2 are its most quietly transforming idea. If time gets tight, compress the geography, the Greek of the greeting, and the Epaphras biography — but never rush the verbs. Everything in the next nine sessions stands on the gift announced there.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Why Start Here?

Open by reading Colossians 1:1-2 aloud — just the two verses. Then name the choice the student book has made: most studies of Colossians dive straight into the Christ-hymn; this one begins at the address. Let your students feel that this is deliberate. The greeting names a writer, a co-sender, a congregation, and a relationship, and the whole letter is shaped by all four. The hymn does not stand alone; it is set within an apostolic frame, and reading the frame first is what will let the hymn land next week with its full weight.

Some students will be eager to get to the heights. Assure them the heights are coming — and that this session is what will make them high. A Christ-hymn from nowhere is poetry. A Christ-hymn from a Roman prison cell, sent to a small town the apostle never managed to visit, is a confession that cost something.

Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus

Two threads to hold together here: the office and the chains.

The office first. *Apostolos* — one who is sent. Paul did not choose this work, was not elected to it, did not qualify for it by natural gift; he was put into it on the Damascus road, *by the will of God*. The student book presses the phrase, and you should too, because it governs everything: the letter the Colossians hold is not the private musing of a religious teacher but the apostolic word, given for the building up of the Church. The same divine will that made Paul an apostle also assigned the shape of his ministry — its scope, its hardship, and the chains in which he now writes.

Then the chains. Do not rush past them. Paul says at the end of the letter that he is in prison *on account of* the mystery of Christ, and his final line — the last words of the whole letter — is *Remember my chains*. The student book follows the traditional setting: Rome, around AD 60-62, house arrest under guard, awaiting a hearing before Caesar. Some scholars have argued for Ephesus or Caesarea; handle this in two minutes, not ten. The point to make is pastoral, not technical — nothing in the letter's teaching hangs on the question, and a teacher who is unafraid of an honest historical note builds trust. What is certain is that the hand holding the pen is chained. Students of *In Christ* will remember the phrase from that study's final session: *an ambassador in chains*. Plant a marker here that you will harvest in ten weeks: this study opens with the chains and will close with them, because the letter does.

And Timothy — *our brother*, the co-sender. He is not co-author; the letter is unmistakably Paul's. But his presence at the greeting says something the whole session will keep saying:

apostolic ministry, even when it issues from one apostle's pen, is the work of a fellowship. Paul does not labor alone. He never has.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

When you reach the two addresses in verse 2 — *in Christ* and *at Colossae* — name what your students are looking at: the doctrine of vocation in a single line of greeting. The believer's deepest identity is in Christ; the believer's daily life is at an ordinary earthly address — a farm, a shop, a classroom, a kitchen table — and the first address is lived out entirely at the second. This is the catechism's Table of Duties in apostolic shorthand: God does not call the Christian out of Colossae but sanctifies him in it. You do not need to develop the doctrine today; the letter itself will build it, all the way to the household table of chapter three. But planting the connection now means every station of ordinary life named later in the study quietly lands as holy ground.

To the Saints and Faithful Brothers in Christ at Colossae

This is your map moment. Show the Lycus valley — three towns clustered together, with Laodicea and Hierapolis prospering and Colossae fading in their shadow, a city past its peak on a road that no longer mattered as much as it once had. Then show Ephesus, a hundred miles west on the coast, where Paul spent three years teaching daily. Paul never came up the valley. So far as we know, he never saw this church. It was founded by Epaphras, a native of Colossae converted under Paul's Ephesian ministry, who carried the gospel home.

A piece of teacher's background the student book does not include, worth one sentence if your class enjoys history: within a few years of this letter, an earthquake devastated the Lycus valley, and Colossae — already declining — faded so thoroughly that the site lay essentially unexcavated into living memory. The town vanished; the letter to it is read on every continent. Say that to a class from a small town and watch what it does.

Then the naming. *Hagios* — saint, holy one — has been flattened in modern usage into a word for spiritual elites. In Paul's vocabulary, every baptized Christian is a saint: holy not by achievement but by God's act of setting apart in Christ. And *pistoi adelphoi* — faithful brothers, believing family. This is simply the apostolic vocabulary for the baptized, and your students should hear themselves addressed by it.

The two addresses deserve their full seven minutes. *In Christ* — the primary identity, the deepest belonging, the sphere in which their life now happens. *At Colossae* — the visible address, the ordinary place where that identity gets worked out. The addresses are not in competition; the first shapes the second. The Colossians are the Christians of Colossae because they are first the Christians of Christ. Every student in your room lives at both

addresses, and most have felt the tension without having language for it. Today you give them the language.

Grace to You and Peace

Keep this brief but do not skip it, because it is liturgically alive for your class. Paul takes the standard Greek greeting — *chairein*, rejoice — and the standard Jewish greeting — *shalom*, peace — and transforms both into gospel: *charis*, grace, and *eirēnē*, peace, *from God our Father*. And he does not wish these things; he pronounces them. The apostolic greeting is a small benediction — the same one, your students may be startled to realize, that has been spoken over them from the chancel their whole lives. The greeting also sets the key signature of the letter: grace before law, gift before demand, indicative before imperative. Students of the earlier volumes will recognize the music. It is the only music Paul plays.

Faith, Love, and Hope

The triad is familiar — your students will hear First Corinthians 13 immediately, and the student book points also to First Thessalonians. Faith looks back and up to what Christ has done; love looks out to the brother and the neighbor; hope looks forward to what has not yet come. Paul thanks God for all three in the Colossians, and notice he thanks *God* for them — the virtues are gifts before they are achievements.

But the teaching weight falls on the order. The hope is not listed last as a reward; it is named as the source — faith and love arise *because of the hope laid up for you in heaven*. The student book's image is worth writing on the board: the hope is the well from which faith and love are drawn. Cut off the hope and the other two wither. This reverses an assumption many adults carry — that hope is the fragile thing at the end, sustained by strong faith — and the reversal is worth pressing slowly. Lutheran theology has held the order firmly: the hope is given first, given in Baptism, sustained in Word and Sacrament, and faith and love grow up around it.

The Word of the Truth, the Gospel

Here is the session's most confessionally distinctive moment, and you should teach it with the catechism's plainness. The hope reached the Colossians through *the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you* — they did not invent it, did not climb up to it; it came. And it did not arrive as inert information. It is *bearing fruit and increasing* — in the whole world, and among them, since the day they heard it.

This is the means of grace, described in motion. The gospel is a living word that does something to its hearers: when it is preached, grace is given; when absolution is pronounced, sins are forgiven; what the Word announces, the Word accomplishes. Augsburg Confession V says exactly this — God has instituted the preached gospel and the

sacraments as the means *through which* the Spirit works faith. If you have students from traditions where the sermon is information and the action happens elsewhere, this section is quietly revolutionary. Do not argue it; just teach Paul's grammar. The gospel is the subject of the verbs.

Epaphras, Our Beloved Fellow Servant

Give Epaphras his due, because the letter does. A native of Colossae, converted under Paul in Ephesus, who carried the gospel a hundred miles home and founded a church — probably three churches, counting Laodicea and Hierapolis — and who is now with Paul in Rome, having made the long journey to seek apostolic help for his congregation. Paul calls him *fellow servant* — *doulos*, the same word he uses of himself — and *faithful minister of Christ*. Same Lord, same calling, same dignity.

Then make the student book's larger point, because it is the point your class most needs: this is how the gospel travels. Not mainly through the famous, but through faithful servants who hear the word, receive it, and carry it home. *The history of the Church is full of Epaphrases* — and so is your congregation's history. The Sunday school teacher, the grandmother, the neighbor who first brought somebody to church: their names will be in the book of life, the book says, if not in our textbooks. You may name this warmly, but keep it general; the moment can turn sentimental if it becomes a memorial roll call. One steadying note for the alumni in the room: Epaphras will reappear — at the letter's close, *struggling in prayer* for them, and once more in the tiny letter this series saves for last, where Paul calls him *my fellow prisoner*.

Paul's Prayer for the Colossians

The prayer asks first for knowledge — *epignōsis*, not bare information but the full, personal knowing of someone who has lived with a friend. And the knowledge has a purpose: *so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord*. The knowledge is for the walking. Students of *In Christ* will hear Ephesians 4:1 underneath this — *walk worthy of the calling* — and you should let them say so; the sibling letters share their hinge. The walk is then described: bearing fruit in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God — knowledge and walking feeding each other — and strengthened with all power for *endurance and patience with joy*.

Linger on those last two words. Joy is not a separate item on the list; it is the manner in which the endurance and patience are exercised — and it comes from God's might, not the believer's temperament. Students who walked through Philippians in this series will recognize the sound of a chained man writing about joy. He has not changed his theme.

He Has Qualified Us, Delivered Us, Transferred Us

The heart. Slow everything down here.

Five perfect-tense verbs in a row, and the student book's drumbeat should become yours: *qualified, delivered, transferred, have redemption, forgiveness of sins*. All of them describe what has already happened. None of them name something the believer must still achieve. Walk the verbs one at a time. **Qualified** — made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light, by God's act, since the believer brings no qualification of his own. **Delivered** — a rescue, a snatching-out of the domain of darkness, done *to* the believer by another hand. **Transferred** — the empire-word for relocating a population; the believer has been moved, his deeper papers rewritten (here is your change-of-address form). And in the beloved Son's kingdom, what he now *has*: **redemption**, the slave bought back — the cost; and **the forgiveness of sins**, the debt wiped clean — the result.

Then the confessional landing, exactly as the student book gives it: this is the language Apology IV builds its whole case from — verbs in the perfect tense with God as the agent, the believer receiving what is already done. The Colossians have not yet read a word of the Christ-hymn, and they already have the entire gospel. Five verbs, and the verbs are enough.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Do not present the five verbs as content to be copied down. Have the class say them aloud, together, slowly — *qualified, delivered, transferred, having redemption, the forgiveness of sins* — and then ask one question: who is the subject of every verb? The answer is the session. Write the five verbs on the board beside your seed list and tell the class they will stay there, in the corner, for all ten weeks — because everything Colossians will ask of them in chapters three and four grows out of what God has already done in these five. If your students leave able to say that salvation in this letter arrives in the perfect tense, the session has succeeded — whatever else gets cut.

Gathering the Threads

Close the teaching by gathering quickly, as the student book does: an apostle in chains by the will of God; a brother and co-sender; a church holding two addresses; grace and peace pronounced; faith, love, and hope, with hope as the well; a gospel that bears fruit; an Epaphras who carried it; a prayer for knowledge that walks; and five verbs of accomplished salvation. Then make the book's last observation your own: the Lutheran reader is already at home in this letter — the benediction, the triad, the means of grace, the worthy walk, the justifying verbs. The letter has barely begun, and everything is here in seed form. Point to the board. Ten weeks of watching the seeds grow.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one for this session — the introductory teaching is substantial, and you also need four minutes at the end for the recorded round of hopes. Favor a single deep question over several shallow ones.

Question 1 — Reading a letter from chains. A good low-stakes warm-up, and the natural choice if your class is new to the series. For veterans of the earlier volumes it can feel like review; if you use it with them, sharpen it — ask what the prison frame *did* to their reading of Ephesians or Philippians, and what they expect it to do here.

Question 2 — The gospel through ordinary, unnamed faithfulness. The warm congregational question, and it lands especially well in small churches. Two cautions: keep it from becoming a eulogy hour, and keep it from becoming a complaint about who does all the work nowadays. Steer toward gratitude and specificity — a name, a Sunday school room, a ride to church.

Question 3 — The two addresses. The most searching question of the set, and the one most likely to surface real life: students feel the tension between *in Christ* and *at Colossae* at the shop, in the field, at the school board meeting. Press gently for the second half — *where* the tension bites — and resist resolving it for them; the letter will spend chapters three and four on exactly this ground.

Question 4 — If the hope became more vivid. The contemplative question, and the hardest to keep concrete. Help it with a quiet prompt: many adults have had seasons — a funeral, a diagnosis, a hospital chapel — when the hope laid up in heaven became briefly vivid, and faith and love changed accordingly. Asking students to remember such a season grounds the question in experience rather than abstraction.

Question 5 — Where the gospel has borne fruit. A testimony question, and in our reticent congregations it can stall. If self-report is slow in coming, widen the lens: where have they watched the gospel bear visible fruit in the congregation, in a family member, across ten years? Fruit observed counts as much as fruit confessed.

Question 6 — Which verb is hardest to believe. The pastoral live wire. Someone in your room finds *forgiveness of sins* nearly impossible to believe is true of him personally, and this question gives him a door. Do not rush whoever walks through it, and do not let the class argue him out of his honesty with cheerfulness. The answer to Question 6 is the absolution — God's verbs do not depend on our ability to feel them — and a teacher who lets that land has done the best work available this hour.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question for Session One, consider Question 3 — the two addresses. It is the most directly on point with the session's frame, it requires no background knowledge, and it opens the vocational thread the whole letter will develop. Question 6 is a strong alternative for a class that is ready to be honest early. And whichever you choose, do not skip the closing round: ask each student what he or she hopes to receive from ten weeks in Colossians, and write the answers down — literally, on paper you will keep. Session Ten has plans for them.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ◆ The five perfect-tense verbs, spoken aloud and written on the board. This is the session's reason for being. Never cut this.
- ◆ The chains and *by the will of God* — enough to establish that a real prisoner wrote these words, and that this study opens and closes with his chains.
- ◆ The two addresses — *in Christ* and *at Colossae*. Two minutes is enough, and it is the session's most personal moment.
- ◆ One discussion question, most likely Question 3.
- ◆ The recorded round of hopes, the closing prayer, and the Session 2 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ◆ The geography. "A small town in a valley, past its peak, that Paul never visited" carries it; the map can return in Session Three, when Laodicea reappears.
- ◆ The alternate-imprisonment theories. Skip entirely unless a student raises them.
- ◆ The Greek of the greeting. Name "grace and peace" as a benediction in one sentence and move on.
- ◆ The fuller Epaphras portrait. "Founded by a local convert, not by an apostle" is the essential point; his biography returns in Session Ten, where the letter itself returns to him.
- ◆ The triad's cross-references. First Corinthians 13 in passing is plenty; spend the saved minutes on the *order* of the three.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the five verbs in the perfect tense — qualified, delivered, transferred, having redemption, the forgiveness of sins — written on the board with God as the subject of every one. Everything else can be compressed or deferred. Those verbs are the ground the entire letter builds on, and the ground your students stand on. A student who walks out with five verbs has the gospel.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ◆ Acts 19:1–10. Paul's Ephesian ministry, from which *all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord* — Epaphras among them. The narrative seedbed of the church at Colossae.
- ◆ Exodus 6:6–8. *I will deliver you... I will redeem you... I will bring you in.* The exodus pattern of deliverance, redemption, and inheritance that stands behind the verbs of Colossians 1:12–14 — Israel's rescue replayed in every believer's transfer.
- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10. Paul's other great thanksgiving built on the faith-love-hope triad, with the gospel arriving *not only in word, but also in power*. The same theology of the working Word.
- ◆ Philemon 1–7 and 23–24. The same prison, the same circle — Epaphras now *my fellow prisoner* — and a thanksgiving that rhymes with this one. Reading it now will quietly prepare you for this series' fourth volume.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ Augsburg Confession, Article V. The means of grace in four sentences: God has instituted the preached gospel and the sacraments, *through which, as through means*, the Spirit works faith. The confessional home of *the word of the truth... bearing fruit and increasing*.
- ◆ Apology IV, on justification. The treatise that argues, against every theology of human contribution, exactly what the five verbs announce: accomplished salvation, received as gift. Even an hour in its opening sections will steel your teaching of verses 12–14.
- ◆ Small Catechism, the Creed, Third Article. *I cannot by my own reason or strength believe... but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel.* Verses 5–6 of this chapter, in catechism form.

- ♦ Small Catechism, the Table of Duties. The two addresses worked out station by station – the catechism's map of life *at Colossae* for those who are *in Christ*.

Commentaries

- ♦ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH). The standard confessional Lutheran treatment, strong on the letter's baptismal theology and its liturgical afterlife. If you buy one commentary for this study, buy this one.
- ♦ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*. The classic Lutheran exposition – older, verbose, and dogmatically sure-footed, with a pastor's eye throughout.
- ♦ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar, Eerdmans). Careful, readable evangelical exegesis. Moo is not Lutheran, but his historical and grammatical work is consistently valuable for the teacher who wants to go deeper – and the volume will serve you again in this series' final study.

A Final Word

You are about to walk ten weeks with a group of students through the most compressed of Paul's prison letters – a letter written to a church the apostle never saw, in a town history nearly forgot, which has outlived the town, the empire, and every philosophy it answers. The Lutheran tradition has loved this letter for its Christology, leaned on it for its baptismal teaching, and sung its wardrobe and its peace for five centuries. It will form your students, and it will form you. Take the teaching seriously. Prepare each week. Pray for your class. Trust the Lord to do what only the Lord can do.

Session One is the foundation. If you establish the frame – a chained apostle, a church with two addresses, and five verbs of salvation already accomplished – the rest of the study has solid ground under it. Do not skimp on this session because it is “introductory.” It is not introductory in the sense of preliminary; it is foundational in the sense of load-bearing.

Next week, the Christ-hymn. Nine verses that may be the highest sustained Christology in the New Testament – *the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation*, the one in whom all things hold together and all the fullness was pleased to dwell. Your students will read Colossians 1:15–23 before they arrive, ideally aloud, and you will have the privilege of walking them slowly up the letter's great peak. Prepare carefully.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the God who has qualified you, delivered you, and transferred you into the kingdom of His beloved Son keep you and your students through all the weeks ahead.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TWO

He Is the Image of the Invisible God

Colossians 1:15–23 · The Christ-Hymn of Colossians

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Two. Last week you built the frame — the chains, the two addresses, the five verbs. This week you teach the painting the frame was made for. Verses 15 through 20 are very likely a hymn the Church was already singing when Paul wrote — two balanced strophes, the first celebrating the Son's relation to creation, the second his relation to the new creation, with a hinge between them that holds the halves together the way the Son himself holds all things together. It is the most concentrated Christology in the New Testament, and it sits at the structural and theological center of the letter. Everything from here to the final greeting stands on this floor.

Two pastoral cautions as you prepare. First, this is the most doctrinally dense session of the ten, and the danger is an hour of lecture that loses the room. The antidote is built into the text: this is a *hymn*. The Colossians did not study this Christology before they believed it; they sang it. Keep the worshiping character of the passage in front of your class all hour, and the doctrine will feel like doxology rather than coursework. Second, two verses in this passage carry old bruises. *The firstborn of all creation* has been misread from Arius to the visitors at your students' doorsteps, and *if indeed you continue in the faith* has frightened tender consciences for centuries. The student book handles both with great care — firstborn as rank, the condition as description rather than threat — and your task is to let that careful treatment set the tone before anyone's anxieties do. Teach what the hymn says, the way the Church has always sung it: as a reason for worship.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

The hymn the Colossians were already singing confesses a Christ who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn-heir of all creation, the one in whom everything was made and holds together, the head of the body, the firstborn from the dead, the dwelling-place of all the fullness, and the maker of peace by the blood of his cross — and then Paul turns the song on his readers with two words, *and you*, so that the cosmic reconciliation lands on particular people in a particular town; teach the hymn as worship and the turn as gospel, and there is no room left for any Christ-plus.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Session Two of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ◆ Read Colossians 1:15–23 slowly, several times — and at least once aloud. Listen for the shape: the creation strophe (vv. 15–17), the new-creation strophe (vv. 18–20), and the hinge — *he is before all things, and in him all things hold together*. The shape will structure your teaching hour.
- ◆ Read the Nicene Creed, second article, at walking pace — *begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made*. The hymn says in nine verses what the Creed says in a paragraph, and you will be laying them side by side.
- ◆ Read the Formula of Concord, Article VIII, at least in the Epitome. The fullness of deity dwelling bodily in Christ is the ground on which the whole article stands, and Session Four will need it again. You want it in your bones, not on a notecard.
- ◆ Review the Small Catechism's explanation of the Second Article — *true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man*. Verse 15 and verse 22, in catechism form.
- ◆ Pray — especially for any students who carry a quiet fear that verse 23's *if* might apply to them. For some, this session can retire an anxiety they have never said out loud.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ◆ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ◆ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ◆ Your whiteboard with the seed list begun last week. Today the first seed — the supremacy of Christ — flowers in full, and you should mark it with some ceremony. Beside the list, you will also sketch the hymn's architecture: two strophes and the hinge.
- ◆ Copies of the Nicene Creed, or hymnals opened to it. Laying the Creed physically beside the hymn — and letting students find the echoes themselves — teaches the antiquity of this Christology better than any assertion.
- ◆ Optional: a hymnal marked at “Of the Father's Love Begotten.” Written in the fifth century, singing exactly this doctrine, and still in your pew racks — the single best object lesson available for the claim that the Church has sung this confession from the beginning. Even one stanza, read or sung at the close, will land it.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ◆ **Firstborn means rank, not origin.** The Arians read *firstborn of all creation* as proof the Son was the first and highest creature; Nicaea in 325 confessed instead *begotten, not made*. The text itself settles it: Scripture's own usage gives *prōtotokos* a rank sense — the Lord makes David, the eighth-born of Jesse, *the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth* (Psalm 89) — and verse 16's *for* clinches it, since the one *by whom all things were created* cannot himself be a created thing. The firstborn is the heir, not the first product.
- ◆ **The fullness dwells bodily — and the Supper depends on it.** *In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*, deepened in 2:9 to *bodily*. This is the seedbed of Formula of Concord VIII: the two natures united in one person, the properties of the divine nature communicated to the humanity — the *communicatio idiomatum*, and within it the *genus maiestaticum* the Lutheran fathers pressed in defense of the real presence. The body given in the Supper is the body in which the fullness dwells. As the student book puts it, Lutheran sacramental theology is not an addition to the hymn; it is the hymn read carefully.
- ◆ **Peace is made by the blood, not modeled by it.** The cosmic reconciliation happens *by the blood of his cross* — accomplished, finished, received as gift. The cross is not an example of self-giving the believer imitates in order to achieve his own reconciliation; it is the place where reconciliation has been achieved. And the *all things* of verse 20 is cosmic in scope without teaching universalism — verses 21–23 show the reconciliation reaching people through faith, and the wider New Testament shows it offered to all and received by those who trust Christ. The repair will reach as far as the rupture has reached.
- ◆ **Presented blameless; kept by the means.** Verse 22 is imputed righteousness in compact form — believers *presented holy and blameless and above reproach* on the basis of what was done in Christ's body of flesh, not on the basis of their record. And verse 23's *if indeed you continue* is not a threat that puts the gift in doubt; it describes what the gift produces. The continuance is the evidence of the reconciliation, not its basis — and the believer perseveres not by willpower but through the means of grace: the Word, the table, the fellowship of the saints, the daily return to Baptism. Neither a Calvinist guarantee independent of means nor an Arminian terror of losing it, but the Lutheran confidence that the Lord who reconciled will sustain.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and seed-list review
0:05–0:12	An ancient hymn: reading it aloud, hearing its shape
0:12–0:19	The image of the invisible God (v. 15)
0:19–0:27	The firstborn of all creation — and the Arian wrong turn (vv. 15–16)
0:27–0:33	The hinge and the headship (vv. 17–18)
0:33–0:40	All the fullness was pleased to dwell (v. 19)
0:40–0:48	Peace by the blood; <i>and you</i> (vv. 20–22) — the heart
0:48–0:52	If indeed you continue (v. 23)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 3 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Spend your best time in two places. First, *firstborn* (vv. 15–16), because the misreading still knocks on your students' doors and this is the hour they get equipped. Second, the turn at verses 21–22 — *and you* — because this is where nine verses of cosmic Christology become gospel for the people in your room. The plērōma background and the list of powers are rich, but if time runs short, these two are where your class most needs you.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

An Ancient Hymn

Open by reading the whole passage aloud — verses 15 through 23, without stopping. Better yet, have a student with a good voice do it while the class listens with Bibles closed, the way the Colossians first heard it. Then tell them what scholars widely agree they just

heard: not freshly composed prose but a piece of early Christian liturgy — a hymn or confession the Church was already singing when Paul borrowed it and aimed it at the situation in Colossae.

Then make the point the student book presses, because it quietly demolishes a century of skeptical talking points: if the hymn is pre-Pauline, the apostle did not invent this Christology — he inherited it. The Church was singing of Christ in these terms within twenty or thirty years of the resurrection. The “high view of Christ” that critics like to call a fourth-century development was the worshiping confession of the first generation. Sketch the architecture on the board as you close this segment — strophe one, creation; strophe two, new creation; the hinge between — and tell the class the hour will simply walk the song.

The Image of the Invisible God

Eikōn — the word behind our *icon*. Not a copy at a distance but a manifestation: the original's own presence made available to sight. Build the Old Testament backdrop the way the student book does — Moses shown only God's back, the seraphim covering their faces, the high priest behind the veil once a year — God invisible not because he is unreal but because he is more real than any creaturely eye can bear. And the Son is the image of *this* God. To look at Jesus Christ is to look at God — not a similar god, not a reminder of God, but God himself made available to human sight. John says it in different words: *the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known*.

Then set up the polemical edge your class will need all study long: whatever the teachers at Colossae were offering — angelic intermediaries, visions, higher knowledge — Paul keeps returning to one point. You have already seen God, because you have seen Christ. There is no higher revelation to be sought. Write it plainly: the image of the invisible God is right in front of you.

The Firstborn of All Creation

Name the history honestly and briefly: in the fourth century the Arians read this phrase as proof that the Son was the first and finest of God's creatures, and the Council of Nicaea rejected the reading — *begotten, not made*. Then tell your class why this is not ancient history: most adults in your room have met this verse on their doorstep, courtesy of the Watchtower, and have wished they knew what to say. This is the hour they learn.

Give them the two tools the student book supplies. First, the word: *prōtotokos* carries a rank sense as well as a temporal one, and Scripture's own usage proves it — David, the *eighth-born* of Jesse, is made *the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth* (Psalm 89:27). Firstborn names the heir, the rights, the preeminence. Second, the grammar: verse 16 begins with *for* — he is the firstborn of all creation *for by him all things were created*. The agent of creation cannot be a creature. Have the class say the logic back to you; a student

who can reproduce it owns it. Then lay the Nicene Creed beside the hymn and let them find the echoes. Equip warmly — the goal is students who can give an answer with gentleness, not students who can win an argument.

By Him, Through Him, For Him — the Hinge

Walk the prepositions briskly: all things created *in* him, *through* him, *for* him — the Son at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the whole arc of creation. Pause on the list — *thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities* — and tell the class why it is there: whatever veneration of angelic powers the Colossian teachers were urging, the hymn cuts its legs off in a line. The powers are not divine. They are *made things*, created through the Son and for him.

Then the hinge, which deserves its full weight: *and in him all things hold together*. The Son is not a watchmaker who wound the cosmos and stepped back; reality coheres in him moment by moment. The student book's sentence is worth reading aloud — the atoms that compose the readers of this study are held in being right now by the same Son the hymn is confessing. Let a beat of silence follow that. It earns one.

Head of the Body; Firstborn from the Dead

The second strophe begins, and the lordship over what he made becomes headship over what he is now making. Keep two points. First, *head* in the ancient frame means source as much as authority — the body lives because the head lives, grows because the head feeds it (Paul will say exactly this at 2:19). So the Church is not a voluntary association of the like-minded, not a religious club, but a living body whose life comes from its head. Students of *In Christ* will recognize the imagery from Ephesians 4, where the sibling letter develops it at length; let them say so.

Second, *the beginning, the firstborn from the dead* — the rank-word again, now applied to a new order: those who will rise because he rose first. The path he opened by his rising is the path his people will walk after him. And then the drumbeat the whole hymn has been building toward: *that in everything he might be preeminent*. First place in creation, in the Church, in the resurrection — first place in everything. Say the phrase the way the hymn does: like a drum.

All the Fullness Was Pleased to Dwell

Handle the background in two minutes: *plērōma* was a loaded word in the first-century religious atmosphere — the totality of the divine, which various proto-Gnostic schemes distributed across a hierarchy of intermediary beings. Some such Christ-plus arithmetic seems to have been circulating at Colossae: Christ a part of the fullness, with the rest reached through other beings and practices. The hymn closes the door in one line. *All the*

fullness — not a portion, not a representative share — *was pleased* to dwell in him, the verb carrying the Father's sovereign delight.

Then slow down, because this is where the Lutheran tradition has pressed hardest, and the student book presses with it. Paul will sharpen the claim at 2:9 — *the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily* — and from these two verses the Formula of Concord's eighth article unfolds the union of the two natures and the *communicatio idiomatum*. You need not deliver a seminary lecture; deliver the payoff.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

When you teach verse 19, put the Words of Institution beside it. The body that hung on the cross was not the body of a man who merely represented God; it was the body in which all the fullness was pleased to dwell — and that is the body the Lord puts into his people's hands at the altar with the words *given for you*. This is the *genus maiestaticum* doing its quiet pastoral work: the Supper is not a symbol of an absent Christ, because the Christ of this hymn is not the kind of Christ who can be absent from his gifts. You do not need the Latin on the board — the student book supplies it for those who want it. What you need is the connection made plainly: Lutheran sacramental theology is not an addition to the hymn. It is the hymn read carefully. Plant it today; Session Four will build on it.

Peace by the Blood; And You

The climax, and the heart of your hour. The fullness dwells in the Son *to reconcile to himself all things... making peace by the blood of his cross*. Hold the two ends of the sentence together for your class: the widest possible scope — all things, on earth or in heaven — achieved by the most particular possible means — blood, on a Roman execution device. If a student raises universalism, give it the student book's two minutes: the hymn gives the reconciliation a cosmic reach, verses 21–23 show it arriving through faith, and Scripture holds both without strain — offered to all, received by those who trust Christ, repairing finally everything the rupture has touched. Do not let the question eat the hour.

Then the turn. *And you*. Nine verses in the third person, and suddenly the second. The cosmic reconciliation has reached particular people in a particular fading town — people who were *alienated, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds*, a past Paul declines to soften. *He has now reconciled* — the hymn's own verb, now with your students as its object — *in his body of flesh by his death*, the physicality named deliberately, because the flesh of Christ is not incidental to redemption but the means of it. And the purpose: *to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him*. Tell your class plainly what they are looking at: this is imputed righteousness — the believer presented faultless before the holy God not

on the strength of his record but on the strength of Christ's finished work. The Reformation is in verse 22.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Stage the turn. Have a student read verses 15–20 aloud — the whole hymn, third person, cosmic. Then you read verses 21–22 yourself, slowly, looking at the class: *And you... he has now reconciled*. The grammatical shift from *he is* to *and you* is the gospel in miniature — the Church's song about Christ becoming God's word to these people — and students who hear the shift performed will understand it better than students who have it explained. If your class leaves able to say that the hymn is true and that verse 21 makes it true *of them*, the session has succeeded — whatever else gets cut.

If Indeed You Continue in the Faith

Do not skip this, and do not let it run long; both errors cost you. Somebody in your room hears verse 23 as a trapdoor under verse 22 — blameless now, but only *if*. Give them the student book's reading: the construction does not put the reconciliation in doubt; it describes what the reconciliation produces. Paul assumes the Colossians will continue, because the gospel they received is the kind that produces continuance. The continuing is the evidence of the reconciliation, not the basis of it. And the keeping is not done by willpower: the believer perseveres through the means by which God reconciled him in the first place — the Word preached, the Supper given, the fellowship of the saints, the daily return to Baptism. To be told *continue in the faith* is to be told to keep going where the Lord has placed you. Close the segment with the verse's last clause — the gospel *proclaimed in all creation under heaven*, with Paul its minister — which hands you next week's session.

Gathering the Threads

Gather quickly: image, firstborn, maker and sustainer, head, firstborn from the dead, dwelling-place of the fullness, peacemaker by blood — and then the hymn landing on the Colossians, alienated then, presented blameless now, kept by the means. Mark the seed list: the supremacy of Christ, flowering in full; the sufficiency of his work, well begun. Then give the class the student book's closing line to carry home, because the next three sessions will lean on it: there is no Christ-plus. There never has been.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. One will fill the time well this week; the teaching content is heavy, and the discussion should breathe rather than sprint.

Question 1 — Sung within decades of the resurrection. A good warm-up with apologetic comfort in it: the high Christology of this passage is not a late invention but the first generation's worship. Watch for the rabbit trail into scholarly debates about authorship and dating; one sentence of "wide agreement" is all the scaffolding the conversation needs.

Question 2 — Looking at Christ is looking at God. The devotional question, and a gentle one. It often surfaces a real difference in how students pray — some to a vague Father, some to Jesus, some uncertainly to both. Let verse 15 do its comforting work: the God they cannot picture has given them a face.

Question 3 — Powers given a dignity that belongs to Christ. The culture question. Useful, but it needs steering: it can collapse into horoscope-shaming or a political grievance hour. Widen the frame — astrology and "manifesting," yes, but also luck, the market, the algorithm, anything treated as a power that must be appeased. Keep the landing on the hymn: created things, every one.

Question 4 — The fullness and the Sacrament. The confessional payoff question, and the right choice for a class that loves the Lord's Supper. If you have visitors from other traditions, teach the gift rather than litigating the controversies; the hymn's logic — the fullness dwells bodily, therefore the body given is no symbol — is winsome on its own.

Question 5 — Alienated then, blameless now, held together honestly. The deepest question of the set. This is *simul iustus et peccator* in lived form — the believer who knows both descriptions are true of him at once — and adults who have carried quiet guilt for decades sometimes say real things here. Do not rush whoever speaks, and do not let the class resolve the tension with a platitude; the tension is where Lutherans live, and verse 22 is its comfort.

Question 6 — What continuing in the faith looks like. The practical closer. Push past generalities to the means: where, concretely, does the Lord sustain them — which pew, which table, which daily habits of Word and prayer? A class that answers this question has its assignment for the next eight weeks.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question, consider Question 5 — holding *alienated* and *blameless* together in honest faith. It is the question the whole passage has been building toward, it requires no background knowledge, and it gives the *simul* — the Lutheran grammar of the Christian life — its first full airing of the study. Question 4 is a strong alternative for a sacramentally rooted class, and it sets up Session Four directly.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ◆ The hymn read aloud, whole, before any teaching. Two minutes that establish everything.
- ◆ *Firstborn* as rank — Psalm 89:27 and the *for* of verse 16. Your students' doorsteps require it.
- ◆ The turn at verses 21–22 — *and you* — performed, not just explained. Never cut this.
- ◆ Verse 23 reassured in one minute: the continuance is the evidence, not the basis.
- ◆ One discussion question, most likely Question 5.

Cut or Compress

- ◆ The plērōma background. “False teachers were dividing the divine fullness; the hymn gives it all to Christ” carries it.
- ◆ The list of powers. Name it as created angels in one sentence; Session Five will reopen the whole question.
- ◆ The Greek anatomy behind *head*. “Source as much as boss” is enough; 2:19 will return to it.
- ◆ The Nicaea narrative. One sentence of history; the logic of verse 16 matters more than the story of the council.
- ◆ The universalism discussion. Skip entirely unless a student raises it.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the hymn read aloud in full — and then verses 21 and 22 read directly over your class: *and you... he has now reconciled... to present you holy and blameless*. The whole session is those two readings standing next to each other: the Church's song about who Christ is, and God's announcement that the song has reached the people in this room. A student who hears both has the gospel — and the floor the next eight sessions are built on.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ◆ John 1:1-18. The Word who was God, through whom all things were made, who *has made him known* — the Johannine twin of the hymn, with its own fullness language: *from his fullness we have all received*.
- ◆ Hebrews 1:1-4. *The radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, who upholds the universe by the word of his power*. The same Christology in another early confession — familiar ground for students of this series' predecessor.
- ◆ Psalm 89:19-37. The Lord makes David *the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth* — the rank sense of firstborn in its native habitat, and your best single tool for verses 15-16.
- ◆ 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. Christ *the image of God*, and the God who said *let light shine out of darkness* shining in hearts *in the face of Jesus Christ*. Image-theology turned doxology.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ The Nicene Creed, second article. *God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made* — the hymn's confession given conciliar form. Read it beside Colossians 1:15-20 and mark the echoes.
- ◆ Formula of Concord, Article VIII (Epitome). The person of Christ: two natures, one person, the properties communicated — the church's careful unfolding of *all the fullness was pleased to dwell*.
- ◆ Small Catechism, the Creed, Second Article and explanation. *True God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man... who has redeemed me... purchased and won me... with his holy, precious blood*. Verses 15 through 22, in the catechism's voice.

- ♦ “Of the Father’s Love Begotten.” Prudentius’s fifth-century hymn, still sung — *he is Alpha and Omega, he the source, the ending he*. The proof, in your own hymnal, that the Church has never stopped singing this passage.

Commentaries

- ♦ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH). Particularly strong on the hymn’s liturgical character and its sacramental afterlife — the right companion for this session’s Lutheran weight.
- ♦ R. C. H. Lenski, *Colossians*. The old master at his most dogmatically sure-footed, with pages on *firstborn* that read like a catechization against Arius old and new.
- ♦ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar, Eerdmans). Full technical detail on the hymn’s structure, the prepositions, and the firstborn debate, for the teacher who wants the grammar exact.

A Final Word

This week you taught the highest sustained Christology in the New Testament to a room of ordinary saints, and you did it the way the Church has always done it — as a song received, not a theory constructed. Do not measure the session by how much terminology survived the hour. Measure it by whether your students heard the turn: *he is, he is, he is — and you*. That turn is the letter’s whole strategy, and it is now your class’s possession.

Next week the camera swings from the Christ of the hymn to the apostle who serves him. Colossians 1:24–2:5 is Paul’s self-portrait at his work — the suffering, the toil, the *struggling with all his energy* — and buried in the middle of it, almost in passing, comes the phrase that gives this volume its name: *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. Your students will read the passage twice before they arrive, with particular attention to verse 27. The title verse deserves to be met slowly, and you will have the joy of introducing it.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the One in whom all things hold together hold you and your students fast — stable, steadfast, and not shifting from the hope of the gospel you have heard.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION THREE

Christ in You, the Hope of Glory

Colossians 1:24–2:5 • The Apostle at His Work

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Three. The hymn has been sung and applied; now Paul turns the camera on himself, and your class gets the New Testament's most personal portrait of apostolic labor — the suffering, the stewardship, the toiling and struggling, the concern for churches he has never seen. And buried in the middle of it, almost in passing, comes the five-word confession this whole volume is named for: *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. This is the session where the study's title gets explained, and you should let the class feel the occasion.

Two cautions as you prepare. First, verse 24 — *filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions* — is the hardest verse in the letter to teach rightly, and a mishandled verse 24 will haunt the rest of your study. The student book sets it on its feet before doing anything else, and so should you: nothing is lacking in the atonement; something is appointed in the mission. Some of your students have Roman Catholic family, and a few may have absorbed the idea that suffering accumulates merit. Make the distinction cleanly and charitably — this is an hour for clarity, not for an anti-Catholic aside. Second, a session about the ministry can drift toward personalities — either an hour of pastor-flattery or, worse, an hour of pastor-review. Keep the office in view rather than the officeholder. Paul is showing the Colossians what the gospel does to a life it has seized, and that is the portrait your class should leave with.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Paul opens a window onto his own labor — rejoicing in sufferings that serve the Church without adding one thing to a finished atonement, stewarding a mystery hidden for ages and now revealed, proclaiming a person with both warning and teaching, struggling with Christ's own energy for believers he has never met — and at the center of the window stands the confession that names this volume, *Christ in you, the hope of glory*: a real indwelling, given through real means, guaranteeing a glory not yet seen; set the hard verse on its feet and walk the title verse slowly, and the session will hold.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Session Three of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ◆ Read Colossians 1:24–2:5 slowly, several times — and at least once aloud. Mark the movement: suffering (v. 24), stewardship and mystery (vv. 25–27), proclamation and toil (vv. 28–29), the struggle for the unseen churches (2:1–3), the warning and the rejoicing (2:4–5).
- ◆ Read Acts 9:1–19. *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* The risen Christ's question on the Damascus road is the single key that unlocks verse 24 — the Church's afflictions are, in a real sense, Christ's own — and the student book turns it.
- ◆ Review Apology IV enough to say its central claim in one sentence: the satisfaction Christ made on the cross is total, perfect, and complete. You will need that sentence, verbatim and without hedging, within the session's first ten minutes.
- ◆ Glance at Augsburg Confession V and XIV — the office of preaching, and the call. Verse 25's *stewardship from God* is their New Testament ground, and the connection dignifies every faithful pastor your students have known.
- ◆ Pray — and this week, pray for your own pastor by name. You are about to teach an hour on the cost of the ministry of the Word. Teach it as someone who has interceded for the man who carries it among you.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ◆ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ◆ Copies of the student book — and have one in your hand, because the cover is about to become a teaching aid.
- ◆ Your whiteboard with the seed list. Two seeds flower today: the hope laid up in heaven (v. 27 names its ground) and the faithful labor of handing the gospel on (the whole passage is its portrait). Mark them.
- ◆ The Lycus valley map from Session One, back by request: 2:1 names Laodicea, and students should see again how Paul's struggle covers a valley full of faces he has never seen.
- ◆ Your congregation's mission prayer list, if you have one — the missionaries and church plants your church supports but has mostly never met. The single best modern illustration of *all who have not seen me face to face*, sitting in your narthex.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ◆ **Nothing is lacking in the atonement; something is appointed in the mission.** Verse 24 must be read with the hymn still ringing: the one who made *peace by the blood of his cross* left no deficit for an apostle to cover. The Scriptures speak of Christ's sufferings in two senses — the atoning sufferings, finished at the cross, and the ongoing afflictions Christ bears in his body, the Church, as the gospel moves through a hostile world (*why are you persecuting me?*). Paul is filling up the allotted share of the second, never supplementing the first. His sufferings serve the Church; they save no one. Ministerial, not satisfactional — and, as the student book has it, suffering in the Christian frame is never wasted.
- ◆ **The indwelling is real, and it is given through means.** *Christ in you* is not a metaphor for moral influence and not a mystical fusion that dissolves the believer; it is the real presence of the real Christ in those who belong to him. And Lutheran theology is careful about the delivery route: Christ comes to dwell in the believer through Baptism, through the Word, through the Supper. The means do not reduce the indwelling — they are how it is given. The believer does not climb up to Christ; Christ has come down through his appointed means to be where his people are.
- ◆ **Warning and teaching is law and gospel.** Paul proclaims a person — *him* — by *warning everyone and teaching everyone*. The warning unsettles false security; the teaching lays out what Christ has done. Lutheran preaching has guarded both functions, because the hearer only warned is left in despair and the hearer only taught is left in presumption. And the office that does this work is a *stewardship from God* — the *Predigtamt*, the public ministry of the Word that Augsburg Confession V and XIV confess, extending the apostolic labor into your students' own chancel.
- ◆ **All the treasures are already in Christ.** *Hidden* in 2:3 means deposited, not inaccessible — stored where they belong, available nowhere else. This is the direct answer to every spirituality that promises advancement beyond the plain gospel, ancient or modern: there is no deeper layer behind Christ, and *plausible arguments* (*pithanologia* — polished, persuasive, hollow) cannot mint treasures they do not hold. The plain Christ is the full Christ. Trading up is trading away.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and seed-list review
0:05–0:13	Filling up what is lacking (v. 24) — setting the hard verse on its feet
0:13–0:20	Minister and steward; the mystery hidden and revealed (vv. 25–26)
0:20–0:28	Christ in you, the hope of glory (v. 27) — the heart
0:28–0:35	Him we proclaim: warning, teaching, toiling (vv. 28–29)
0:35–0:42	The struggle for those he never met (2:1–3)
0:42–0:48	Plausible arguments; absent in body, rejoicing (2:4–5)
0:48–0:56	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 4 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Two places. First, verse 24 — take the full eight minutes to set it on its feet, because every minute spent here purchases peace for the rest of the study. Second, verse 27 — the title verse deserves an unhurried walk: the indwelling named, the false readings cleared away, the means of delivery made plain. If time runs short, compress the Greek word studies of 2:1–3 and the background of the smooth talkers; never compress these two.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

From Hymn to Ministry

Open by naming the camera move: the hymn confessed the cosmic Christ; the application brought him to the Colossians; now Paul turns to himself. Tell the class why — because the window onto Paul's ministry is not opened for its own sake. Paul is unusually personal here, and the student book names the purpose: he is showing the Colossians what a life looks like when it has been seized by the Christ the hymn just confessed. Not pious heroism. Evidence.

Filling Up What Is Lacking

Read verse 24 aloud and then stop, because somebody in the room just flinched. Name the problem honestly: read carelessly, the verse sounds as though the atonement came up

short and the apostle is covering the difference. Then close that door with the letter's own material — the hymn confessed *peace by the blood of his cross*; the cross is the finished work; Apology IV is emphatic that the satisfaction Christ made is total, perfect, and complete. Say it without hedging. The blood of the cross is enough.

Then build the right reading with the Damascus road. The risen Christ did not ask Saul, *why are you persecuting my Church?* He asked, *why are you persecuting me?* The Church's afflictions are, in a real sense, Christ's own ongoing afflictions — not the atoning sufferings, which are finished, but the missionary sufferings he bears in his body as the gospel crosses a hostile world. There is an appointed measure of those, and Paul, in his prison cell, is bearing the share allotted to an apostle. His sufferings serve the Church; they save no one. Ministerial, not satisfactional — give your class those two words to hold.

Then the comfort, which the student book refuses to skip and so should you: the believer who suffers in faithfulness — the illness borne with patience, the marginalization endured for the gospel's sake, the daily costs of vocation — is participating in exactly what Paul names here. Real afflictions, serving the body, held in the providence of the ongoing mission. Suffering, in the Christian frame, is never wasted. Watch the room when you say that; somebody needed it today.

Minister and Steward; the Mystery Hidden and Revealed

Two word studies, kept brisk. *Diakonos* — the apostle is a servant; the word gives us *deacon*. *Oikonomia* — a stewardship, literally the management of a household; Paul has been handed the household of God to manage by making *the word of God fully known*. Pause one beat for the application: this is the New Testament shape of the office your students see filled every Sunday — a stewardship given, not a career chosen.

Then *mystērion*, and fix the definition, because the English word misleads: in the New Testament a mystery is not an unsolved puzzle but a secret God has now told — hidden for ages and generations, *now revealed to his saints*. The Old Testament saints knew the same gospel by promise that the Church knows by fulfillment; what was held in shadow has been made plain. Give the class the old Latin formula in English, because it will serve them for life: the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed; the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. Two testaments, one revelation. And the disclosure, Paul is about to say, has a name.

Christ in You, the Hope of Glory

The heart of your hour, and the title moment of the study. Hold up the student book. Tell the class that the five words on the cover come from this verse, and that the next eight minutes are about why a whole volume hangs on them.

Walk the words slowly, the way the student book does. *Christ in you* — a real indwelling, not a figure of speech. Clear away the two false readings: it is not a metaphor for moral influence (trying to be like Christ), and it is not a mystical fusion in which the believer dissolves. It is the statement that Christ himself is present in those who belong to him — by his Spirit, through his Word — the same *in* the hymn used when all the fullness was pleased to dwell in him.

Then answer the question your better students are already forming: *how* does Christ come to be in the believer? Through means. Through Baptism, where the believer is buried with Christ and raised with him. Through the Word, by which the Spirit creates and sustains the faith that holds him. Through the Supper, where his true body and blood strengthen the faith that has him. The means do not shrink the gift; they deliver it. The believer does not climb up to Christ; Christ has come down to where his people are.

And then *the hope of glory* — the same hope-word as verse 5, the hope laid up in heaven, now shown its ground: the Christ already present is the guarantee of the glory not yet seen. Down payment, firstfruits, pledge. Close the segment with the student book's quiet correction of every sentimental reading: the verse is not the apostle's pious wish. It is his statement of what God has actually done.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Make the title land physically. Book in hand, have the class say the five words aloud together — *Christ in you, the hope of glory* — and then ask where, concretely, that indwelling was given to each of them. Walk them to the answer if needed: at a font, most of them as infants; from a lectern and pulpit, week after week; at an altar rail, as recently as last Sunday. The whole Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace is the cash value of this verse, and a student who can point to the font when asked *where* Christ came to dwell in him has the session — and the volume's title — for life.

Him We Proclaim

The object of apostolic preaching is a person — *him* — not a system, a program, or a philosophy. Then the two participles, which are worth their own five minutes: *warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom*.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

Name the participles with their Lutheran names: the warning is the law's work — unsettling false security, calling to repentance — and the teaching is the gospel's work — laying out what Christ has done for those with ears to hear. The hearer who is only warned is left in despair; the hearer who is only taught is left in presumption. Paul does both, and so does every faithful pastor. If your class has students who grew up under preaching that was all warning, or under preaching that was all affirmation, this is the moment they get language for what was missing. Walther made the proper distinction between these two words the mark of all sound preaching, and your students hear it practiced — most of them without knowing its name — every Sunday. Today they learn the name.

Then the goal and the cost. The goal: *that we may present everyone mature in Christ* — the same *present* as verse 22's blameless presentation, now aimed at maturity, *teleios*, brought all the way to the end the Father intends. The apostle is not satisfied with conversion; he labors for maturation — a useful word for adult students who quietly suspect Bible class is optional after confirmation. The cost: *kopiaō*, toil to the point of exhaustion; *agōnizomai*, the wrestler's struggle. And the power: *with all his energy that he powerfully works within me*. The labor is Paul's; the strength is Christ's. Both true. Both required for an honest account of ministry — and of teaching adult Bible class, for that matter.

The Struggle for Those He Never Met

Here is your map moment returned: Colossae, Laodicea, *all who have not seen me face to face* — a valley of believers Paul carries without ever having met them. If you brought your congregation's mission prayer list, this is its minute: your church does exactly this, struggling in prayer and support for congregations it will never visit. The apostolic pattern continues.

What Paul wants for them comes in three linked phrases — hearts *encouraged*, lives *knit together in love* (the word for bones joined in a body, soldiers locked in a phalanx), and the destination, *all the riches of full assurance* — *plērophoria*, a heart filled to overflowing, a ship under full sail. Then make the student book's sharp point about what ministry is *for*: not the production of religious feelings, not the maintenance of an institution, not even moral improvement — but full assurance of the knowledge of God's mystery, *which is Christ*. Every faithful pastor's job description, in one clause.

Plausible Arguments; Absent in Body, Rejoicing

Two closing notes. First the warning: *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* are hidden in Christ — *hidden* meaning deposited, stored where they belong, available nowhere else

— and therefore no one should be deluded by *plausible arguments*. Sketch the situation in two sentences: polished teachers were making the Epaphras-gospel sound plain, simple, beginner-grade, with advanced treasures available elsewhere for those ready to trade up. Paul's answer: do not trade. The plain Christ is the full Christ; the simple gospel is the deep gospel. Your class will meet the modern versions in Question 5.

Then the ending, which is not anxiety but joy: absent in body, present in spirit — a real apostolic presence, not a greeting-card sentiment — and *rejoicing* at their *good order* (*taxis*, the discipline of a well-arranged household) and the *firmness* of their faith (*stereōma*, something solid under pressure). The reports from Epaphras are good. The labor is not in vain. Paul, in his chains, rejoices — and the student book's last line of the section makes a fine last line for yours: so can we.

Gathering the Threads

Gather briskly: sufferings that serve without saving; an office held as stewardship; a mystery hidden and now revealed; the title verse and its means of delivery; warning and teaching; the struggle for the unseen; treasures all deposited in one place; and a closing note of rejoicing. Mark the seed list — hope and faithful labor, both flowering — and send the class out with the verse they came for, said once more together: *Christ in you, the hope of glory*.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. One, given full room, will serve better than three rushed; this session's teaching content carries emotional weight, and the discussion should be allowed to match it.

Question 1 — Suffering that served the Church. A tender question, and a rich one: caregiving, illness borne openly, costs absorbed for the congregation's sake will all surface. Two guardrails: do not let answers turn into a ranking of sufferings, and keep the ministerial frame visible — the suffering *serves*; it never *earns*. Verse 24 rightly taught protects the whole conversation.

Question 2 — Christ in the Old Testament. A joyful question for a class that loves its Bible. The Emmaus road is your friend here — *beginning with Moses and all the Prophets*. One caution: enthusiasm can slide into allegory free-for-all, finding Jesus under every rock; keep the reading disciplined by promise and fulfillment, shadow and substance.

Question 3 — The indwelling and your sense of yourself. The title-verse question, and the deepest of the set. Listen for the student who says, honestly, that he does not *feel* indwelt — and answer with the session's own teaching: the indwelling rests on means, not moods.

Christ's presence in the believer is as objective as the water, the word, and the bread that delivered it. For a student who has spent years measuring his faith by his feelings, this question can be the door out.

Question 4 — Warning and teaching in preaching. Useful, with one live risk: it can become a review of your pastor's sermons. Steer firmly toward the students' own *receiving* — which do they find easier to hear, and why — and away from homiletical critique. The honest answer for most Lutherans is that the warning is harder to receive and the teaching easier to take for granted; both admissions are worth surfacing.

Question 5 — Plausible arguments today. The culture question, and a good one for a class that talks easily. Help them name modern *pithanologia*: the self-improvement spirituality that makes the gospel sound passive, prosperity teaching, the polished deconstruction influencer, the claim that real insight lies beyond organized religion. Then press the second half — what helps you hold firm — and steer the answers toward the means: the Word, the table, the catechism, the congregation.

Question 6 — Where the firmness is tested. A grounded closer. Push past “in hard times” to particulars — the hospital, the funeral home, the workplace, the dinner table with adult children who have left the faith. Naming where the *stereōma* is tested is the first step toward carrying the means there.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question, consider Question 3 — the indwelling and the self. It is the title verse made personal, it requires no background, and it gives you the chance to do the session's best pastoral work: moving a class from feelings to means. Question 1 is a strong alternative for a class that has known real suffering, especially if verse 24 visibly landed during the teaching hour.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ Verse 24 set on its feet — the two senses of Christ's afflictions, with Apology IV's sentence said plainly. Three minutes minimum. Never cut this.
- ♦ The title verse, walked slowly, with the means of delivery named. This is the session's reason for being.
- ♦ Warning and teaching named as law and gospel — two sentences will do it.

- ◆ One discussion question, most likely Question 3.
- ◆ Closing prayer and the Session 4 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ◆ The *diakonos* and *oikonomia* word studies. “Servant holding a stewardship” carries both.
- ◆ The Laodicea geography. One gesture at the map; the valley returns in Session Ten.
- ◆ The Greek of 2:1–5 — *plērophoria*, *taxis*, *stereōma*. Keep “full assurance,” “good order,” “firm faith”; drop the vocabulary.
- ◆ The background of the smooth talkers. One sentence; Session Five gives them a full hour.
- ◆ The mission-list illustration. Lovely when there is time; expendable when there is not.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the title verse rightly taught: *Christ in you, the hope of glory* — a real indwelling of the real Christ, given not through feelings or attainments but through the font, the Word, and the altar, and standing as the guarantee of a glory not yet seen. A student who can say what the five words on the cover mean — and where the gift was handed to him — has the heart of the letter and the name of the study.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ◆ Acts 9:1–19. *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* The Damascus road question that unlocks verse 24 — the Church’s afflictions as Christ’s own — heard by the very man who would write this passage.
- ◆ 2 Corinthians 4:7–12. Treasure in jars of clay; *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus... so death is at work in us, but life in you.* Paul’s fullest commentary on ministerial suffering that serves the Church.
- ◆ Romans 16:25–27. The doxology twin of this passage — *the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed.* The same hidden-and-revealed grammar, sealing another prison-shadowed letter.

- ◆ Luke 24:13–35. The Emmaus road — *beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*. The risen Christ practicing the concealed-and-revealed reading of the Old Testament.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ Apology IV, on justification. The complete and perfect satisfaction of Christ — the doctrinal floor under verse 24, and the reason no human suffering can be satisfactorial.
- ◆ Augsburg Confession, Articles V and XIV. The office of the ministry instituted by God, filled by those rightly called — verse 25's *stewardship* in confessional form, and a dignity worth naming over your own congregation's pulpit.
- ◆ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*. The classic Missouri Synod lectures on exactly what *warning everyone and teaching everyone* requires — and what happens to hearers when either is missing.
- ◆ Small Catechism, the Sacrament of the Altar. *Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins* — the means by which the indwelling Christ keeps arriving, in the catechism's own words.

Commentaries

- ◆ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH). Careful and pastoral on verse 24, and strong on the stewardship of the office — the session's two pressure points handled confessionally.
- ◆ R. C. H. Lenski, *Colossians*. Pages on *filling up what is lacking* that read like a pastor defending his people's consciences — old, warm, and sure.
- ◆ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar, Eerdmans). Thorough on *mysterion*, the syntax of 1:24, and the flow of 2:1–5, for the teacher who wants the grammar exact.

A Final Word

This week you taught the verse on the cover of the book — and you taught it the Lutheran way, with the indwelling anchored to the font, the lectern, and the altar rather than to the weather of anyone's feelings. You also walked your class through the hardest verse in the letter and left the atonement whole. That is a good hour's work, and not a small one.

Notice, before you move on, where this session quietly placed you. Paul struggled for believers he had never seen; Epaphras carried the gospel to a valley the apostle never visited; and you, this week, taught the same mystery to a room of saints in a place no

apostle ever saw. The line from verse 29 runs through Epaphras, through twenty centuries of faithful hands, to your whiteboard. Your toil is a small share of that struggle, and the energy that carries it is not yours either.

Next week is the most sacramental session of the ten. Colossians 2:6–15 takes your class to the font — *buried with him in baptism... raised with him through faith* — and to the cross, where the record of debt was nailed and the rulers and authorities were disarmed and led in triumph. Your students will read 2:6–15 twice before they arrive, with particular attention to verse 9 and the baptismal language of verses 11 and 12. Prepare with your own baptism in mind; the session will be better for it.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may Christ in you — the hope of glory — keep your heart encouraged and your faith firm through all the weeks ahead.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION FOUR

Rooted and Built Up in Him

Colossians 2:6–15 · Baptism, the Cross, and the Triumph of Christ

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Four — the theological heart of the letter, and the most sacramental hour of the ten. Three of the most important verses in the New Testament for Lutheran theology stand in this passage: *in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily; buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him; the record of debt that stood against us... nailing it to the cross*. The student book calls the passage a charter for the Lutheran Confessions written a millennium and a half before the fact, and it is not exaggerating. Verse 9 is the foundation of Formula of Concord VIII. Verses 11–12 are the New Testament basis of the catechism's baptismal teaching. Verse 14 is the cornerstone of Apology IV. Your class is about to walk through the family vault.

Two cautions, and one opportunity. First, this is the session where Lutheran distinctives are most exposed, and if you have visitors from Baptist or Reformed backgrounds, verses 11–12 will press on them. Teach the gift winsomely rather than combatively — the aim of the hour is comfort for the baptized, not a debate won. The text itself does the confessing; you need only refuse to soften it. Second, density: three load-bearing doctrines share one hour, and the temptation is to teach all of Formula VIII and the whole Large Catechism. Resist. The student book hands you the payoff sentences; deliver those and trust them. And the opportunity: many lifelong Lutherans have never once been told, plainly, that their baptism *did something* — that it was God's act and not their parents' ceremony. For some students, this is the session that gives them their baptism back. Teach it accordingly.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

In ten verses Paul lays the letter's deepest floor — the rule that the way into Christ is the way on, the warning against captivity by hollow philosophy, the banner confession that the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily in Christ and that the baptized have been *filled in him*, the font where they were really buried and really raised with him, the record of debt nailed canceled to the cross, and the rulers and authorities led disarmed in his triumph; teach it all as gift, and your students will leave with their baptism returned to them and their indictment visibly canceled.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Session Four of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ◆ Read Colossians 2:6–15 slowly, several times — and at least once aloud. Mark the movement: the rule (vv. 6–7), the warning (v. 8), the fullness (vv. 9–10), the font (vv. 11–12), the making-alive (v. 13), the nail and the triumph (vv. 14–15).
- ◆ Reread the Small Catechism on Baptism — all four parts, but at minimum the second: *What benefits does Baptism give? It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.* You will quote it verbatim in the teaching hour, because it is verses 11–13 in catechism form.
- ◆ Read Romans 6:1–11, the twin passage. The two texts interpret each other, and a student will almost certainly bring Romans up.
- ◆ Look up the date of your own baptism, if you do not know it. You will be inviting your students to do the same, and the invitation lands better from a teacher who has done it.
- ◆ Pray — for the doubting and the differently taught who may be in your room, and in thanksgiving for the font where God buried and raised you.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ◆ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ◆ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ◆ Your whiteboard with the seed list. Today the second seed — the sufficiency of Christ's work — flowers in full, and the five verbs you parked in the corner in Session One come back into play: this passage is where the perfect tense earns its keep.
- ◆ A printed copy of the Small Catechism's Baptism section, or catechisms enough to share.
- ◆ The font. If your class meets within walking distance of the sanctuary, plan to end the teaching hour beside it — verses 11 and 12 happened to most of your students at that exact spot, and standing there changes how the verses are heard. If you cannot move the class, at least point.

- ◆ Optional: a paid-in-full invoice, a canceled check, or any document stamped PAID. When you reach the *cheirographon*, an actual piece of canceled paper in your hand makes the verse visible.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ◆ **The way in is the way on.** *As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.* The Colossians received Christ by hearing the gospel and trusting it; they continue by hearing the same gospel and trusting the same Christ. There is no graduation from the gospel into something more advanced — the gospel is not bread for beginners but, as Luther insisted, daily bread for the whole Christian life. Rooted (the plant), built up (the building), established (the foundation), and the whole of it *abounding in thanksgiving*.
- ◆ **The fullness dwells bodily — and the believer has been filled.** Verse 9 is the banner verse of Lutheran Christology: the whole fullness of deity dwells in Christ *bodily*, in the actual humanity — the ground of Formula of Concord VIII and the *communicatio idiomatum*, and therefore of the Supper, since the body in which the fullness dwells can be present wherever Christ's Word promises it. And verse 10 closes every Christ-plus loophole: *you have been filled in him* — perfect passive, done by another, still standing. There is no higher filling to seek.
- ◆ **Baptism gives what it says.** The Colossians received a *circumcision made without hands* — no human knife, God the agent — and in baptism they were *buried with him* and *raised with him*: real participation, not symbol, not reminder. The catechism's answer comes straight from these verses. And the Lutheran balance holds against both errors: against any *ex opere operato* mechanism, baptism's gift is received through faith; against any mere-sign reduction, baptism really gives what it promises. The sacrament gives; faith receives. The faith is the empty hand, not the cause — *the powerful working of God* is the cause.
- ◆ **The cross is courtroom and battlefield at once.** Verse 14: the *cheirographon* — the signed record of debt with its legal demands — set aside, nailed to the cross, canceled in full: justification. Verse 15: the rulers and authorities disarmed, publicly shamed, led in Christ's triumphal procession: Christus Victor. Lutheran theology holds both, in Apology IV and in the hymnal, as two angles on one single, sufficient, finished work — and neither is a flourish; both are exegesis.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and seed-list review
0:05–0:12	As you received, so walk: rooted, built up, established (vv. 6–7)
0:12–0:18	Philosophy and empty deceit; the <i>stoicheia</i> (v. 8)
0:18–0:25	The whole fullness, bodily — and you filled in him (vv. 9–10)
0:25–0:34	Buried and raised: the circumcision made without hands (vv. 11–12) — the heart
0:34–0:40	Dead, then made alive; all trespasses forgiven (v. 13)
0:40–0:47	The record of debt nailed; the powers disarmed (vv. 14–15)
0:47–0:55	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:55–1:00	Closing prayer (at the font, if you can) and Session 5 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Two places carry the session: verses 11–12, where your students' baptisms are unfolded as burial and resurrection with Christ, and verse 14, where their indictment is nailed up canceled. Give the font its full nine minutes and the nail its full seven. If time runs short, compress the *stoicheia* options to one sentence and skip the Reformed-and-Zwinglian background entirely — but do not arrive at verse 11 late.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

As You Received, So Walk

Open with the rule, because everything in the next six sessions hangs on it: *as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him*. The way the Colossians came in — hearing the gospel, trusting it — is the way they go on. Say the student book's summary line and let it stick: the way in is the way on. There is no graduation from the gospel; the mature Christian is

not the one who has moved beyond Christ but the one who has gone deeper into the Christ he received at the beginning. Luther's image seals it: the gospel is daily bread, not a starter course.

Then the three pictures, briskly: *rooted* — a plant drawing nourishment from soil it grew down into; *built up* — walls rising on a foundation already laid; *established* — set firm, immovable. Receiving and continuing, both in every image. And the surprising fourth term: *abounding in thanksgiving*. Gratitude is not decoration for Paul; it is the air the Christian breathes — where thanksgiving has gone cold, faith has gone cold. If your class sings, tell them what the student book observes: the Lutheran chorale tradition is what verse 7 produces when it is taken seriously.

Philosophy and Empty Deceit

The verb first: *see to it that no one takes you captive* — the word for what a slave-raider does. The teachers at Colossae were not offering an enrichment course; they were offering a captivity. Then the three descriptors, with the careful distinctions the student book draws. *Philosophy and empty deceit* — not a condemnation of philosophy as a discipline (Luther studied Aristotle; the Lutheran scholastics borrowed freely) but of *this* philosophy, which had the form of wisdom without its substance. *According to human tradition* — not a condemnation of all tradition, but of tradition set above the Word of God, where it becomes an instrument of conscience-captivity; tell the class to file this, because the Augsburg Confession's articles on human traditions stand on this verse and Session Five lives here. *According to the elemental spirits of the world* — *stoicheia*, most likely the spiritual powers the false teachers wanted appeased; whatever the exact reference, the hymn has already answered it: the *stoicheia* are made things, and following made things over the Maker inverts the cosmos. Close with Paul's portable test: any teaching that does not have Christ at the center is the captivity, however impressive it sounds.

The Whole Fullness of Deity, Bodily

Verse 9 is the verse Lutheran Christology has carried like a banner for five hundred years, and your students should hear it read twice. The hymn said the fullness was pleased to dwell in him; verse 9 adds the decisive word — *bodily*. In the actual human body of the man Jesus of Nazareth, the whole fullness of deity is present. You planted the Supper connection in Session Two; today the student book lets you say it in full: because the fullness dwells bodily, Christ's body is not a finite object locked in one location — it can be where his Word promises it will be, and where the Word says *this is my body*, the body is there. Sacramental theology rises out of Christology, and Christology rises out of this verse. Two minutes is enough; the catechized will follow, and the visitors will hear gift rather than polemic if you keep the verbs Christ's.

Then do not let verse 10 escape — it is the session's quiet thunder. *And you have been filled in him.* Perfect passive: filled, by another, and the filling still stands. The Colossians being courted by fullness-merchants already have the fullness. So does every baptized soul in your room. The Christ in whom they have been filled is *the head of all rule and authority* — which means the believer who has him has nothing above him either.

Buried and Raised: the Circumcision Made Without Hands

The heart of your hour. Walk it as slowly as the student book does.

First the puzzle: Paul tells mostly Gentile believers, never brought under the Mosaic knife, *you were circumcised*. Then the solution: *with a circumcision made without hands* — no human agent, no physical incision; God himself performed it. What it accomplished: *the putting off of the body of the flesh* — the old self under sin's dominion stripped away like a garment (students of *In Christ* will hear Ephesians' old-man-and-new under this; Session Seven will hand them the full wardrobe). And how: *by the circumcision of Christ* — the cross, where his body was cut off in death.

Then the location, and read it with weight: *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him.* Not symbolically associated with his burial. Not reminded of it. *Buried with him* — and in the same water, *raised with him*. Baptism is not a picture of something that happened elsewhere; it is the place where the burial and the resurrection are actually given. Now quote the catechism word for word — *it works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation* — and tell the class where that answer comes from: this verse, and Romans 6. Their confirmation memory work was exegesis all along.

Finish with the balance, because somebody needs each half: the faith of verse 12 is not the cause of what baptism does — *the powerful working of God* is the cause; faith is the empty hand that receives. Against the bare-mechanism error, the gift is received in faith; against the mere-symbol error, the gift is really given. The sacrament gives. The faith receives.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

Point out what is missing from verses 11 and 12: any action by the baptized. *You were circumcised* — passive. *Made without hands* — no human agent. *Buried with him... raised with him* — done to you, by *the powerful working of God*. Then name the implication your students have defended at kitchen tables their whole lives: this is why Lutherans baptize infants. The old circumcision was given to eight-day-olds who contributed nothing but their presence; the circumcision made without hands runs on the same grammar — God the agent, the recipient receiving. Baptism is not the believer's testimony about his decision; it is God's action on the believer. A class that sees the passive verbs has the whole infant-baptism conversation already won — gently, from the text, with no raised voices required.

Dead, Then Made Alive

Verse 13 names the before and after without flinching, and so should you. *Dead in your trespasses* — not weakened, not sick, not in need of a push: dead, with no capacity to climb out. Then the divine verb: *God made alive together with him*. Resurrection, applied — the same rising that came to Christ at the tomb came to your students at the font. And mark the participle that carries it: *having forgiven us all our trespasses*. The making-alive happened *by way of* forgiveness; the two cannot be pried apart. And the scope: *all*. Not most; not the respectable ones; not the ones thoroughly repented of. The student book calls this Lutheran soteriology in one sentence — dead, made alive, by forgiveness, covering everything, all of it done by another — and a dead man receives life the only way a dead man can: passively, gratefully, in faith.

The Record of Debt Nailed; the Powers Disarmed

Two images close the passage, and both are unforgettable if you let them be seen.

The first is legal. The *cheirographon* — literally a handwriting — was a signed IOU, a debtor's own acknowledgment of what he owed, enforceable in court. Every sinner stands under one: a record of trespasses, signed by his own life, listing demands he cannot satisfy. Hold up your canceled document here if you brought one. Then the verbs: God *set it aside* — not ignored, not waved away, but actively removed — *nailing it to the cross*. Give the class the picture some early readers saw: the Roman practice of posting the indictment above an executed criminal's head — *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*, Pilate's placard — and, in the deeper reality, every debt of every sinner posted there with it. The believer who looks at the cross is looking at his own indictment: signed, nailed, canceled. There is no separate ledger still running.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Before you leave verse 14, make the document personal. Ask the class to call to mind — silently, no sharing — the one item on their record they most wish were not there. Give them ten full seconds; do not fill the silence. Then read the verse over them, slowly: *the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands — this he set aside, nailing it to the cross*. That item was on the document. The document is on the cross. The cross has done with it what crosses do. This is the closest an hour of Bible class comes to the absolution, and a teacher who lets it land — without hurrying to the next point — has done the best work available this week. The perfect-tense verbs from Session One are still on your board; point to them. This is what they were for.

The second image is military, and it inverts everything the eye saw on Good Friday. *He disarmed the rulers and authorities* — stripped them of the weaponry that made them dangerous — *and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them*. The picture is a Roman triumph: the victorious general parading his defeated enemies before the watching city. What looked like the powers' victory over Christ was Christ's triumph over the powers — the cross was their losing, not his. This is the dimension called *Christus Victor*, and the student book is careful in a way you should echo: Lutheran theology holds it firmly without making it the only frame. The cross is courtroom *and* battlefield — debt canceled and enemies disarmed — two angles on one finished work, held together in Apology IV and in half the hymns your class knows by heart. And for Colossae the application was sharp: to submit now to the *stoicheia* is to bow to a defeated enemy whose chains are already on. Your students are on the winning side. They belong to the victor.

Gathering the Threads

Gather with the student book's inventory, because the class should feel the weight of where they have been: the rule of the way in and the way on; the warning against hollow captivity; verse 9 and Formula VIII; verses 11–12 and the catechism; verse 13 and the total forgiveness; verse 14 and Apology IV; verse 15 and the triumph. A confessional treasury — and then the point of all of it, which is where Paul began: *so walk in him*. In this Christ. Not a higher one, not a supplemented one. The one received at the font is the one in whom the walking continues to the end. Mark the sufficiency seed flowered, point once more at the five verbs in the corner, and close — at the font, if your building allows it.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Choose one and give it room; this session's teaching runs long and deep, and the discussion should be a place to breathe, not a second lecture.

Question 1 — Walking in the Christ you received. A solid warm-up that retrieves Session Three's trading-up theme. Watch for vague piety; press gently toward particulars — what would “seeking something more advanced” actually look like in their lives, and what does daily bread look like instead?

Question 2 — Traditions of men and the conscience. The live wire. In a Lutheran congregation this can slide straight into the hymnal wars — worship styles, customs, who moved the candles. Hold the AC's distinction in front of the room: the question is not whether traditions exist (they should, and good ones serve the gospel) but whether any tradition is being imposed as *necessary for salvation* or allowed to displace the Word. Keep it charitable; Session Five gives this theme its full hour.

Question 3 — The fullness and the Sacrament. A deliberate echo of Session Two's question, now sharpened by *bodily*. If your class took it up two weeks ago, push further: what changes at the rail when the body received is the body in which the fullness dwells? If they did not, this is its hour.

Question 4 — Buried and raised: your baptism and your self. The identity question, and the session's natural center. Give the class Luther's grammar to take home: not *I was baptized*, as though it were a certificate filed away, but *I am baptized* — a present-tense standing fact, and the devil's least favorite sentence. For the student who measures faith by the morning's mood, the date on a baptismal certificate is a sturdier fact than any feeling.

Question 5 — Your record nailed above his head. The absolution question. Somebody in the room has carried one item for decades, and this question opens the door the teaching hour unlocked. Do not rush whoever walks through it, and do not let the class cheerfully minimize what they name. The answer to Question 5 is verse 14, read again, slowly.

Question 6 — Fearing defeated powers. The broadest question — spiritual, cultural, political, personal — and the one most likely to wander into the news cycle. Let it range briefly, then bring it home to the verse: whatever power the class names, the question is not whether it is real but whether it is *armed*. Verse 15 says its weapons are gone.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question, consider Question 4 — baptism and the self. It is the session's gift made personal, it requires no background, and it sends every student home with the present-tense sentence the hour was built to deliver: *I am baptized*. Question 5 is the strong alternative for a class that was visibly moved at verse 14 — follow the room. Whichever you choose, end beside the font if you possibly can.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ◆ Verses 11–12 walked slowly, with the catechism quoted verbatim. This is the session's reason for being. Never cut this.
- ◆ Verse 14 — the *cheirophon* nailed, with the silent personal application. The session's pastoral peak.
- ◆ Verse 9 in two sentences: the fullness, bodily — planted in Session Two, confirmed today.
- ◆ One discussion question, most likely Question 4.
- ◆ Closing prayer and the Session 5 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ◆ The *stoicheia* options. One sentence — “most likely the spiritual powers behind the world's furniture” — and move.
- ◆ The Reformed-and-Zwinglian background at verse 9. Teach the gift; skip the controversy.
- ◆ The three word-pictures of verse 7. Name rooted, built, established in a single breath.
- ◆ The Roman triumph's history. Keep the parade image; drop the background.
- ◆ Bach and the chorales. Lovely when there is time.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be baptism taught as God's work that actually did something: buried with Christ, raised with Christ, by the powerful working of God, exactly as the catechism says. A student who walks out knowing that his baptism was God's act on him — not his family's ceremony, not his own testimony — and who can say *I am baptized* in the present tense, has received what this session exists to give. Everything else can wait for another year's study. That cannot.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ◆ Romans 6:1–11. The twin passage — *buried therefore with him by baptism into death... we too might walk in newness of life*. Read side by side with Colossians 2:11–12, each text steadies the other.
- ◆ Genesis 17:9–14. The covenant of circumcision, administered to infants of eight days — the old-covenant grammar of God marking those who contribute nothing but their presence, standing behind verse 11.
- ◆ 1 Peter 3:18–22. *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you* — Peter's own refusal of the mere-symbol reading, on familiar ground for students of this series' predecessor.
- ◆ John 19:19–30. Pilate's placard above the cross and the final word from it — *it is finished*. The indictment posted, and the perfect tense spoken from the nail itself.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ Small Catechism, Holy Baptism. All four parts — benefits, power, meaning, and the daily drowning of the old Adam. Verses 11–13 in the church's teaching voice; quote part two in class.
- ◆ Large Catechism, Holy Baptism. Luther at full strength on the font: baptism as God's water-and-Word act, valid and standing, to be returned to daily — the source of *I am baptized* as the answer to every assault.
- ◆ Formula of Concord, Article VIII. The person of Christ and the *communicatio idiomatum* — verse 9's confessional unfolding, revisited from Session Two with the Supper now fully in view.

- ♦ The rite of Holy Baptism in your hymnal, especially the Flood Prayer. Luther's baptismal liturgy gathers Noah, the Red Sea, and the Jordan into the font — the whole Old Testament reading of verses 11–12, prayed over every candidate.

Commentaries

- ♦ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH). This is the session where Deterding earns his place on your shelf — the baptismal and Christological exegesis is the series at its confessional best.
- ♦ R. C. H. Lenski, *Colossians*. Vigorous, warm, and immovable on verses 9 through 15; his pages on the *cheirographon* preach.
- ♦ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar, Eerdmans). Excellent on grammar and background throughout — but be aware that Moo reads the baptismal verses as a Baptist. Use his syntax; keep your catechism.

A Final Word

Of the ten sessions in this study, this is the one your students are most likely to remember in twenty years — not because of anything clever in the teaching plan, but because this is the hour their baptism was handed back to them as God's own act, and their oldest debts were shown nailed up canceled. If the room was quieter than usual at verse 14, that was not a failure of discussion. That was the text working.

Next week the doctrine becomes defense. Colossians 2:16–23 is Paul's *therefore* — because the fullness dwells in Christ and the debt is canceled, *let no one pass judgment on you* in questions of festivals and food, asceticism and visions. It is the great passage of Christian freedom, the liberty of the conscience under Christ alone, and it has been load-bearing for Lutherans since the Augsburg Confession. Your students will read 2:16–23 twice before they arrive, noticing the catalogue of regulations Paul lists and the refrain that answers them: the substance belongs to Christ. The shadows have served their purpose.

May the Lord bless your teaching — and may you go to bed this week the way Luther counseled, with the one sentence under your pillow that this whole session exists to give: I am baptized.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION FIVE

Let No One Pass Judgment on You

Colossians 2:16–23 · Shadows, Substance, and the Freedom of the Conscience

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Five — the freedom session, and the hour where your class discovers that the Augsburg Confession is, in places, simply Colossians 2 with a 1530 date on it. Paul's *therefore* draws the practical conclusion from everything Session Four established: because the fullness dwells in Christ and the debt is canceled, *let no one pass judgment on you* in food and festivals, and *let no one disqualify you* with asceticism and visions. The substance has come. The shadows have served their purpose. The believer is free.

Three cautions, because freedom is the easiest doctrine in the letter to teach badly. First, evenhandedness. The student book applies this text in every direction — against ascetic super-spirituality, against traditionalist requirements pressed as divine law, and against progressive sensibilities imposed as binding on how Christians must think and speak. Keep that balance. A freedom session that only names the other side's legalisms is itself a kind of self-made religion. Second, contempt. The text frees the conscience from imposed rules; it does not license sneering at the fasting neighbor or the brother-in-law who keeps a seventh-day Sabbath. Freedom is not contempt, and Romans 14 sits close beside this passage. Third, license. Somebody will hear “the rules don't bind” as “nothing matters,” and the honest answer is that Paul is three verses away from the most demanding ethics in the letter. Flag it — Sessions Six through Eight are the answer — but do not resolve it prematurely. Let the freedom be heard in full before the new obedience arrives, because that is the order Paul wrote it in.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Because the believer has been buried and raised with Christ and filled with the fullness in him, no teacher may sit as judge over his conscience in matters of food, calendar, asceticism, or visionary credentials — the old regulations were shadows and the substance belongs to Christ, the impressive super-spirituality has let go of the Head, the rules are human precepts that cannot bind what God has not bound, and the whole apparatus, for all its appearance of wisdom, is of no value in stopping the flesh; only the gospel kills the flesh, and the conscience Christ has freed must not be sold back into captivity.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Session Five of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ◆ Read Colossians 2:16–23 slowly, several times — and at least once aloud. Mark the two prohibitions that structure it: *let no one pass judgment on you* (v. 16) and *let no one disqualify you* (v. 18), and the devastating final clause — *of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh*.
- ◆ Read Augsburg Confession XV, on church ordinances made by men. It is one short paragraph, and you will read it aloud in class. Glance also at XXVI (the distinction of meats) and XXVIII (the limits of ecclesiastical power) — both are extended commentary on this passage.
- ◆ Read Mark 7:1–13 — Jesus against the Pharisees, *teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*, quoting Isaiah 29. Verse 22's *human precepts and teachings* deliberately echoes it, and the student book draws the line.
- ◆ Review the Small Catechism's explanation of the Third Commandment — *we should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it*. The Sabbath question is coming, and Luther's explanation is your answer.
- ◆ Pray — especially for any student whose conscience has been bound for years by rules God never gave. This is the session that can unbind it.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ◆ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ◆ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ◆ Your whiteboard with the seed list. The sufficiency of Christ's work keeps flowering this week — today as freedom; mark it.
- ◆ A copy of Augsburg Confession XV, printed or flagged in a Book of Concord. One paragraph, read aloud, lands the session's confessional point better than ten minutes of summary.
- ◆ A lamp or strong flashlight and a solid object — a cross from the classroom shelf works well. You are going to cast a shadow on the wall, and then you are going to bring the object forward. More on this below.
- ◆ A catechism, flagged at the Third Commandment, for the Sabbath question.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ◆ **Shadow and substance.** The food laws, festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths were *a shadow of the things to come* — *skia*, the silhouette — and *the substance belongs to Christ* — *sōma*, the body that cast it. Passover anticipated his death, Weeks his Pentecost, Booths the dwelling of God with his people, the Sabbath the rest he gives. The Old Testament is therefore fulfilled, not abolished: the ceremonial law has reached its end in the one it pointed to, while the moral law — the Ten Commandments, written also on the conscience — continues to bind. To impose the shadows now is to walk backward in the history of salvation, preferring the silhouette to the body.
- ◆ **Hold fast to the Head.** The rival program — asceticism, angel-veneration, visionary credentials — is a recognizable and recurring religious type: special access claimed, severity as the means, visions as the evidence, and the ordinary believer *disqualified*. Paul's diagnostic cuts through every century's version of it: such a teacher is *not holding fast to the Head*, and the body grows only from the Head, *nourished and knit together* through the joints and ligaments he supplies. Any spirituality that decenters Christ has detached itself from the only source of growth there is.
- ◆ **The conscience is bound only by what God has commanded.** The prohibitions — *do not handle, do not taste, do not touch* — are *human precepts and teachings*, the same coinage Jesus condemned from Isaiah 29. Traditions may exist in the Church for order, decency, and love; the moment one is pressed as necessary before God, it becomes an instrument of captivity. Augsburg Confession XV, XXVI, and XXVIII, and Apology XV, are sustained commentary on these verses — and the baptized have a deeper reason still: they *died* with Christ to the *stoicheia*. The address has changed. The old realm's rules no longer bind its former residents.
- ◆ **Rules cannot kill the flesh.** Paul concedes the *appearance of wisdom* — the ascetic looks serious — and then names the reality: *ethelothrēsikia*, self-made religion, will-worship, devised by man rather than commanded by God, and *of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh*. Worse than no value: the flesh flourishes under regulations, feeding on secret pride and comparison; the man who fasts to be holy may become a worse man through his fasting. Only the gospel kills the flesh — the daily return to baptism, the Word, the Supper. The flesh is killed at the cross, not by the ascetic's whip.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and seed-list review
0:05–0:13	Therefore: shadows and the substance (vv. 16–17)
0:13–0:21	Asceticism, angels, visions — and the Head (vv. 18–19)
0:21–0:28	You died; the address changed (v. 20)
0:28–0:35	Do not handle, taste, touch: human precepts (vv. 21–22)
0:35–0:43	Self-made religion, of no value against the flesh (v. 23) — the heart
0:43–0:48	Christian freedom in the Confessions: AC XV read aloud
0:48–0:56	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 6 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Two places. First, verse 17 — shadow and substance is the hermeneutical key your students will use on the Old Testament for the rest of their lives; give it its full minutes and its demonstration. Second, verse 23 — the diagnosis that rules cannot kill the flesh is the session's deepest pastoral work, and it must land before the Confessions material does. If time runs short, compress the festivals catalogue and the tour of AC articles — but never the shadow, and never the diagnosis.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Therefore: Let No One Pass Judgment

Open with the *therefore*, because the logic is the lesson: everything in this passage rests on what Session Four established. Because the fullness dwells bodily in Christ, because your students were buried and raised at the font, because the record of debt is nailed up canceled — *therefore* no teacher gets to sit as judge over them in questions of food and drink, festival and new moon and Sabbath. The verb is *krinō*, the courtroom word. The false teachers were claiming jurisdiction over consciences, and Paul's answer is jurisdictional: the verdict on these questions has already been rendered, and not by them.

Then walk the catalogue briskly — the Mosaic food regulations, the pilgrimage feasts, the monthly observances, the seventh-day rest — pressed on Gentile believers as the markers of the truly spiritual. And then the sentence that settles it, one of the most important in the New Testament about how to read the Old: *these are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Perform the verse. Set your lamp behind the cross from the classroom shelf and cast its shadow on the wall. Let the class look at the shadow: it is real, it is informative, it is genuinely cross-shaped — a faithful silhouette of the thing that casts it. Then pick the cross up and carry it forward into the room. Now ask: having the object in hand, who keeps studying the wall? That is *skia* and *sōma* — Passover, Weeks, Booths, and the Sabbath were true shadows cast backward through history by a body that has now arrived. To impose the shadows after the substance has come is to turn your back on the cross in your hands and lecture the wall. Thirty seconds of lamp and shadow will outlast every sentence of explanation, and the class will reach for it instinctively when the Sabbath question arrives — which it will, in about a minute.

Handle that Sabbath question when it comes, briefly and without anxiety, because Lutherans have a settled answer. The Sabbath was a shadow of the rest Christ gives, and the shadow is fulfilled. The Church gathers on the Lord's Day — the day of resurrection — by ancient and excellent custom, for the sake of the Word and the Sacrament, not because the calendar itself binds the conscience. Luther's Third Commandment explanation names the commandment's abiding core: do not despise preaching and God's Word, but gladly hear and learn it. The day serves the Word; the day was never the point. Two minutes, catechism in hand, and move on.

Close the segment with the careful Lutheran balance the student book draws: fulfilled is not abolished. The ceremonial law was not illegitimate; it was completed. The moral law still binds every conscience. And honor is still owed to the shadows — they were God's own foretellings — which Question 1 will let your class explore.

Asceticism, Angels, and Visions — and the Head

The second prohibition: *let no one disqualify you*. Sketch the rival program in its three parts — a severe and showy asceticism (the word is *tapeinophrosynē*, humility gone professional), some veneration of angelic mediators, and the cultivation of visions as spiritual credentials. Then give your class the student book's most useful observation: this is a recognizable type that resurfaces in every century of church history. The teacher claims special access; his severity is the advertised means; his visions are the evidence; and the ordinary believer — the one who simply eats with thanksgiving, hears the Word,

and communes — is quietly *disqualified*, demoted to second-class. Most of your students have met this type, whether in a revivalist's tent, a wellness influencer's feed, or a relative's superior piety.

Paul's verdict is surgical: such a teacher is *puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind* — inflated with empty air, and his parade-ground spirituality is itself a product of the flesh. And then the diagnostic your class should write down, because it tests every movement they will ever encounter: he is *not holding fast to the Head*. The body grows from the Head — *nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, with a growth that is from God* — the hymn's imagery returned from Session Two, with 2:19 making explicit what the head supplies. A teacher who has made himself the source has let go of the source. Whatever growth he offers cannot come from God, because he has detached himself from where God gives it.

You Died; the Address Changed

Verse 20 is the deepest argument in the passage, and it is built entirely out of Session Four. *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?* The Colossians died — at the font, buried with Christ — and what they died to includes the *stoicheia* and the whole realm where those powers legislate. Then hand your class the student book's image, because it closes a loop your study opened on the first day: you have moved. The address has changed. In Session One they learned they live *in Christ* and *at Colossae* — and here is the legal consequence: the believer's governing address is the kingdom of the beloved Son, and the old realm's regulations have no jurisdiction over its former residents. To submit to them now is religious nostalgia — living as if the baptism had not happened.

Then the line that gives the freedom its weight: this liberty is not a mood or a preference; it is *the freedom of the baptized*, and to surrender it is to surrender something Christ has paid for. Christian freedom is expensive property. Paul will not let the Colossians give it away to men with impressive diets.

Do Not Handle, Do Not Taste, Do Not Touch

Let the class hear the regulations themselves — Paul quotes the tone exactly: *do not handle, do not taste, do not touch*. Three slamming doors. Then his dry parenthesis: all of it concerning *things that perish as they are used* — food that is eaten and gone, drink that is drunk and gone. The teachers were spending religious seriousness on groceries. And then the source, named with a loaded phrase: *according to human precepts and teachings* — the very words Jesus took from Isaiah 29 against the Pharisees, who taught as doctrines the commandments of men. The Colossian teachers stand in that line: rules devised by men, pressed as if commanded by God.

Now make the confessional application with the student book's own examples, because they keep the text honest in both directions. Sunday is a good and excellent day to gather around Word and Sacrament — but to bind the conscience to the day as if breaking the pattern were itself sin against God repeats Colossae's error. Fasting can be fine outward training — Luther himself said so — but to require it as a condition of standing before God loads the conscience with what Christ has not loaded it with. The principle underneath: the conscience of the Christian is bound only by what God has commanded. Traditions may serve order, decency, and love. The moment one is pressed as necessary for salvation, it has become a captivity — and the Lutheran church was, in large part, born saying so.

Self-Made Religion, of No Value Against the Flesh

The heart of the hour, and Paul's sharpest sentence. Begin with the concession, because it is pastorally honest: the regulations have *an appearance of wisdom*. The disciplined ascetic genuinely looks serious — more serious, frankly, than the ordinary believer who eats with thanksgiving and worships without elaborate restraints. Paul does not deny the appearance. He denies the reality.

Two strikes. First, the word Paul may have coined for the occasion: *ethelothrēskia* — will-worship, self-made religion, devotion that proceeds from the worshiper's own choosing rather than from God's command. Tell the class what the Reformation did with this word: it became one of Luther's most pointed weapons against the mountain of monastic regulations and invented devotions that had come to bind medieval consciences. God is not honored by what men devise to honor him; God is honored by what he has commanded. Second, the deeper strike, and the one to slow down for: the whole apparatus is *of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh*. Tighten the rules, multiply the prohibitions, apply severity to the body — the flesh is not subdued. The flesh *laughs* at regulations. Worse, it feeds on them: secret pride in compliance, comparison with the less disciplined, congratulation on one's own seriousness. Read the student book's hardest sentence to the class and let it sit: the man who fasts to be holy may become a worse man through his fasting than the man who eats with gratitude. The ascetic program promises to subdue the flesh and instead feeds the flesh's most dangerous appetite — the appetite for self-righteousness.

Then the remedy, which your class already owns from last week: only the gospel kills the flesh. The same baptism that buried the believer put the old Adam under water, and the catechism says he is to be drowned there daily. The Word withdraws the food the flesh feeds on; the Supper strengthens what the flesh cannot produce. Point at the font direction one more time. The flesh is killed at the cross, not by the ascetic's whip.

Christian Freedom in the Lutheran Confessions

The student book closes with a section your class should not miss: five centuries of steady application. Walk it briefly — AC XV on ordinances made by men (observable for good order, never necessary for salvation), AC XXVI on the distinction of meats, AC XXVIII on the limits of churchly power over consciences, and Melanchthon's sustained biblical case in Apology XV.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

Read Augsburg Confession XV aloud, in full, from the book — it is one paragraph — and tell the class what they just heard: their church, in 1530, before the emperor, making exactly the argument of Colossians 2:16–23. The Confessions are not an addition to this text; they are this text, applied under pressure. Then make the student book's evenhanded application explicit, because it protects the session from becoming a partisan exercise: wherever the conscience is bound by what God has not commanded — by progressive sensibilities about how Christians must think and speak and vote, by traditionalist requirements about exactly how worship must be conducted, by ascetic claims that the truly spiritual abstain from this or that — the text is doing its work. The substance belongs to Christ. The shadows have passed. The believer is free. A class that hears the blade cut in every direction has understood it; a class that hears it cut only one way has been handed a weapon instead of a freedom.

Gathering the Threads

Gather with the passage's own movement: no judgment in food and calendar, because the shadows have given way to the substance; no disqualification by the visionary ascetics, because they have let go of the Head; no submission to the old realm's rules, because the baptized have died and moved; no binding of the conscience by human precepts; and no illusions about what severity can accomplish, because rules cannot kill the flesh — only the gospel can. Mark the seed list, and send the class out with the student book's closing refrain, which is the whole session in six words: He is enough. He has always been enough.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. One, well chosen, will fill the time; this session's discussion tends to run hot, and your main work will be steering rather than prompting.

Question 1 — Shadow and substance in the Old Testament. The hermeneutic question, and a rich one. The second half is the part to press: receiving the substance *without despising the shadow*. The feasts and the food laws were God's own foretellings, honorable in their season — fulfilled is not embarrassing. Watch for the drift toward treating the Old Testament as obsolete; the Emmaus road from Session Three is the corrective.

Question 2 — Signs that a teacher has let go of the Head. The discernment question. Help the class build the marks from the text: Christ decentered, the teacher exalted, ordinary means despised, secret knowledge claimed, plain believers disqualified. One firm guardrail: keep it typological, not local — this is not the hour to name area ministries or relitigate somebody's former congregation.

Question 3 — Where you drift back into rules. The personal question, and the gentlest road into the session's pastoral center. The honest answers are usually quiet legalisms: devotional scorekeeping, guilt over missed quiet times, measuring one's standing by streaks and disciplines. Receive them without amusement; these are real captivities, and verse 20 is their emancipation.

Question 4 — Self-made religion in the culture and in your own habits. Useful precisely because of its second half. The class will name the culture's versions easily — wellness asceticism, purity spirals of every political flavor, performative piety online. The harder and better work is *in your own habits*; model it by going first if the room hesitates.

Question 5 — Rules that failed to produce the holiness they promised. The testimony question. Most adults have a story — the resolution regime, the devotional system, the diet-of-the-soul that ended in pride or collapse. Let the stories establish what verse 23 asserts, then ask the follow-up the text begs: what actually did help? Steer the answers toward the means.

Question 6 — Freedom and life in the Church. The adiaphora question, and the one most likely to wander into worship wars. Hold both halves of the Lutheran answer in view: the conscience is free in what God has not commanded, *and* love gladly keeps good order for the neighbor's sake. Freedom is never a weapon against the weak conscience — Romans 14 stands guard here — and good order is never a ladder to heaven. A class that can say both sentences has the doctrine.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question, consider Question 3 — where you drift back into rules. It is the most personal, it requires no background, and it lets the session do its real work: unbinding consciences rather than merely critiquing legalism in the abstract. Question 5 is the strong alternative for a class of seasoned saints with stories to tell — and it tees up the means of grace as the true remedy.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ◆ Shadow and substance, with the lamp demonstration. Two minutes, unforgettable. Never cut this.
- ◆ Verse 20 — you died; the address changed. The Session One callback that makes the freedom baptismal rather than attitudinal.
- ◆ Verse 23's diagnosis — rules cannot kill the flesh; only the gospel can. The session's pastoral center.
- ◆ One discussion question, most likely Question 3.
- ◆ Closing prayer and the Session 6 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ◆ The festivals catalogue. "Food laws and the sacred calendar" covers it.
- ◆ The angel-worship and visions background. Two sentences; the *holding fast to the Head* diagnostic is the keeper.
- ◆ The tour of AC articles. Read XV's single paragraph and let it stand for the rest.
- ◆ The Isaiah 29 and Mark 7 background. Name the echo in one sentence.
- ◆ The Sabbath excursus — unless a student raises it, in which case give it its two minutes; that question should never be brushed off.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the pairing of the passage's two great sentences: *the substance belongs to Christ*, and the regulations are *of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh*. Together they free the conscience and demolish the alternative — nothing may bind what God has not bound, and nothing but the gospel can do what the rules pretend to do. A student who leaves with both sentences leaves free, and knows why the freedom holds.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ◆ Mark 7:1–13. Jesus against the tradition of the elders — *teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*, from Isaiah 29. The confrontation Paul's *human precepts and teachings* deliberately echoes.
- ◆ Galatians 4:8–11. *You observe days and months and seasons and years!* — the twin warning, written to converts drifting back toward the *stoicheia*, with Paul's fear that his labor was in vain.
- ◆ Romans 14:1–12. The other side of freedom: *let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains*. The guardrail that keeps liberty from becoming contempt for the weak conscience.
- ◆ Hebrews 10:1–10. *The law has but a shadow of the good things to come* — the same shadow-and-substance grammar applied to the whole sacrificial system, on familiar ground for students of this series' predecessor.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ Augsburg Confession XV, XXVI, and XXVIII. Ordinances made by men, the distinction of meats, and the limits of church power over the conscience — three articles that are extended commentary on this passage. Read XV aloud in class.
- ◆ Apology XV. Melancthon's sustained biblical defense: the Church may have traditions for order and love, but no human authority can bind the conscience where Christ has set it free.
- ◆ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520). The two famous theses — perfectly free lord of all, perfectly dutiful servant of all — that hold this session and the next three together in a single breath.

- ◆ Small Catechism, the Third Commandment. *Gladly hear and learn it* — the Lutheran answer to the Sabbath question, in two sentences your students memorized long ago.

Commentaries

- ◆ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH). Especially valuable here for tracing the passage's afterlife in the Confessions — the session's exact concern.
- ◆ R. C. H. Lenski, *Colossians*. Fierce and bracing on will-worship; Lenski writes about *ethelothrēskia* like a man who has met it.
- ◆ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar, Eerdmans). The best detailed treatment of the catalogue in verse 16 and the difficult syntax of verses 18 and 23.

A Final Word

This week you taught freedom — and taught it the hard way, with the blade cutting in every direction, including toward the legalisms your own class finds most comfortable. That is the only honest way to teach this text. A conscience in your room that has been bound for years by rules God never gave may have been quietly set loose this hour, and you may never know which one. The text knows.

Next week the letter makes its great turn. Colossians 3:1 pivots from doctrine to life — *if then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above* — and the second half of the study begins. The freedom you taught today is about to be given its true shape: not license, but resurrection ethics — putting to death what is earthly, putting off the old self, putting on the new, until *Christ is all, and in all*. Your students will read 3:1–11 twice before they arrive, watching how every imperative stands on an indicative: *you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*. The order matters, and they have spent five weeks learning why.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may you stand fast in the freedom for which Christ has set you free — holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body grows with a growth that is from God.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION SIX

Seek the Things That Are Above

Colossians 3:1–11 · The Great Turn from Doctrine to Life

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Six, and to the second half of the study. This is the hinge of the letter — the verse where two chapters of confession and defense pivot into forty verses of life. Students who walked through *In Christ* will recognize the moment: this is Colossians' Ephesians 4:1, the *therefore* on which everything practical stands. And the hinge turns on one small word rightly read: the *if* of verse 1 is the *if* of inference, not of doubt. *Since* you have been raised with Christ. The whole ethical half of Colossians is addressed to people whose resurrection has already happened.

Three cautions. First, the vice lists. Verses 5 through 9 name *porneia*, impurity, evil desire, anger, slander, and lying in a mixed room of adults, and the temptation runs in two directions — squeamish vagueness that teaches nothing, or a specificity that turns the hour into an inquest. Teach the lists plainly and let them diagnose every heart in the room, starting with the teacher's; nobody is to be made an example. Second, moralism. If your students leave feeling scolded, the session failed even if every word was true — because the order got lost. Paul puts *you have died* before *put to death*, and your hour must keep that sequence audible from the first minute to the last. Third, do not rush verses 3 and 4. *Your life is hidden with Christ in God* is the most pastorally loaded sentence in the chapter, and somebody in your room — the caregiver, the one whose retirement looks nothing like the brochure, the one whose faith feels invisible even to himself — has been waiting all study for it.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

The letter turns from doctrine to life on a *since*, not an *if* — because the Colossians have already been raised with Christ, they are to seek the things above where he sits enthroned, knowing their true life is hidden with him in God until the day of appearing; and from that accomplished resurrection flow the imperatives — put to death the sins of desire, put away the sins of relationship, for the old self is off and the new self is on and being renewed after its creator's image — until every human category bows to the one declaration that closes the passage: Christ is all, and in all.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Session Six of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ◆ Read Colossians 3:1–11 with a pencil, and do for yourself the exercise you will give the class: mark every verb that describes something already done to the believer, and every verb that commands something. You are preparing the session's central move, and it works best from a teacher who has made the two lists himself.
- ◆ Reread the Small Catechism on Baptism, Part Four — the Old Adam *drowned by daily contrition and repentance... and a new man daily emerge and arise*. Verse 5's *put to death* is this paragraph in apostolic form.
- ◆ Read Ephesians 4:17–32. The sibling letter's old-self-and-new passage, with its own relational vice list — the closest parallel in Paul, and your *In Christ* alumni will hear it immediately.
- ◆ Review the Large Catechism on the First Commandment, at least its famous opening — *that to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, properly speaking, your god*. Verse 5's *covetousness, which is idolatry* is going to need it.
- ◆ Pray — particularly for the students whose lives currently look unimpressive to them. Verses 3 and 4 are for them, and you want to teach those verses as intercession, not information.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ◆ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ◆ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ◆ Your whiteboard with the seed list. The third seed — the new life of those who belong to Christ — flowers today; mark it with some ceremony, because the next three sessions live in its branches.
- ◆ Clear board space for two columns. The session's central move is a verb sort, and the columns need room to breathe: ALREADY DONE on the left, NOW DO on the right.
- ◆ A catechism, flagged at Baptism Part Four and the First Commandment.
- ◆ One deliberate omission: resist the temptation to bring an old garment and a new one this week. The put-off-and-put-on imagery arrives in verses 9 and 10, but the wardrobe belongs to Session Seven, where Paul dresses the new self piece by piece — and the prop will land twice as well there for not having been spent here.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ♦ **The indicative carries the imperative.** *Since* you have been raised — the Greek construction assumes the condition true — *seek*. The *do* rests on the *is*; the ethical commands of the New Testament are consequences of salvation, never prerequisites. This is the shape of all Pauline ethics and the structure Lutheran preaching exists to protect: *because you have* always comes before *therefore do*. A Christian life built in the other order is not a harder version of the same thing; it is a different religion.
- ♦ **The believer's true life is hidden — and kept.** *You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God* — *kekryptai*, perfect tense, concealed and remaining concealed. The hiddenness is not absence but safekeeping: the believer's righteousness is hidden under Christ's, his victory held with Christ in heaven, his glory stored up for the appearing, when *you also will appear with him in glory*. This is the hidden life under the cross — the Christian does not look like much in this age, and the visible story is not the final story.
- ♦ **Died once; dying daily.** *Put to death what is earthly in you* — *nekrōsate* — is the catechism's daily drowning of the Old Adam, the imperative working out what the baptismal indicative accomplished. Both are true at once: the believer has died with Christ, and the believer daily puts to death what keeps surfacing — the *simul* in motion. The first list names the sins of desire, and its barb is the last item: *covetousness, which is idolatry* — the covetous man worships what he covets. And the relief is in the tense of verse 7: *you once walked* in these. The wrath is real, and it has passed the baptized by.
- ♦ **The new self is the Spirit's project, and Christ levels every category.** The off-and-on of verses 9–10 is baptismal clothing language — the old self laid aside, the new self put on, *being renewed* (present continuous) *in knowledge after the image of its creator*: Genesis 1 restored in Christ. Sanctification is not the believer's self-improvement plan but the Spirit's ongoing renewal of what baptism gave. And in that new self, the world's defining categories — Greek and Jew, barbarian and Scythian, slave and free — lose their power to rank anyone before God. Not dissolved in the natural order, but dethroned at the foot of the cross: *Christ is all, and in all*.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and seed-list review
0:05–0:13	The great turn: <i>since</i> you have been raised (v. 1) — the heart
0:13–0:20	Set your minds: orientation, not escapism (v. 2)
0:20–0:28	Hidden with Christ; the day of appearing (vv. 3–4)
0:28–0:36	Put to death: the sins of desire (vv. 5–7)
0:36–0:43	Put away: the sins of relationship (vv. 8–9)
0:43–0:49	Old self, new self, restored image; Christ is all (vv. 9–11)
0:49–0:56	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 7 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Two places. First, verse 1 and its *since* — the entire second half of the study depends on your students hearing the order rightly, and the verb sort deserves its full minutes. Second, verses 3 and 4 — the hidden life is the session's pastoral center, and it must not be hurried past on the way to the vice lists. If time runs short, compress the Scythian background and the second list's word studies; never compress the order, and never the hiddenness.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The Great Turn: Since You Have Been Raised

Open by naming the architecture: two chapters of doctrine are about to become forty verses of life, and the hinge is one small word. Read verse 1 and put the question to the class — what kind of *if* is this? Then settle it the way the student book does: the Greek construction takes the condition as true. This is the *if* of inference — *since* you have been raised with Christ. Paul is not asking the Colossians to wonder whether their resurrection is real; he is reminding them that it is, and drawing the consequence. The Christian life is not the life of those striving to earn resurrection but of those who have been raised and are learning what raised life looks like.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Put two columns on the board — ALREADY DONE and NOW DO — and send the class through Colossians 3:1–11 hunting verbs. Let them call them out and sort them together: *raised with Christ* — done. *You have died* — done. *Hidden with Christ* — done. *Put off the old self, put on the new* — done. And the other column: *seek, set your minds, put to death, put away, do not lie*. Then stand back and let the class see what they built: every command in the right column leans on a completed act in the left, and the left column is entirely God's verbs. This is the structure of the whole Christian life made visible in chalk, and a class that constructs it themselves will never again confuse the order. Leave both columns up for the rest of the study; Sessions Seven and Eight keep adding to the right column, and the left column never changes.

Then the first imperative: *seek the things that are above* — present continuous, keep on seeking, the daily orientation of a soul that has been raised, the way a compass needle seeks north. And the destination is not a vague upward mood: it is *where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God* — Psalm 110, the most-quoted Old Testament text in the New. The cosmic supremacy your class confessed in the hymn is now an enthronement, and the seeking has an address.

Set Your Minds: Orientation, Not Escapism

Verse 2 names the thinking that goes with the seeking: *phroneō*, the whole orientation of the mind — what it returns to in unguarded moments, what frames its evaluations. And then defuse the misreading before it forms, because the student book is emphatic: this is not spiritual escapism. The very next chapter takes up marriage, parenting, work, and household life, and Paul cares intensely about all of it. The contrast is not between earthly duties and heavenly ones; it is between two *frames*. The mind set on things above engages earthly matters with the gospel as its frame; the mind set on things on earth lets the earthly become the frame and forgets the gospel.

Give the class the student book's pictures, because they are the doctrine of vocation in miniature: the Christian farmer does not stop farming because he seeks things above — he farms with his mind set on Christ; the Christian mother does not stop mothering — she mothers with her thoughts returning to the Lord who stationed her there. The vocation is not the rival of the heavenly orientation; it is its theater. One sentence of preview: Session Eight will spend a full hour in that theater.

Hidden with Christ; the Day of Appearing

Slow down here, and lower your voice if that is your way, because these two verses are the chapter's pastoral treasure. *You have died* — past tense, completed at the font. *And your*

life is hidden with Christ in God — kekryptai, perfect tense: concealed, and remaining concealed. The believer's true life is not on display in this age. The world looks at him and sees an ordinary person — born of woman, fed on bread, subject to illness and death — and the world is not wrong about what it sees; it is only blind to what it cannot see. The believer's truer self is stored up, kept safe, deposited with Christ in the presence of God. The hiddenness is not an absence. It is a safekeeping.

Tell your class plainly what this means on the hard days, because this is why the verse exists: your righteousness is hidden — covered by Christ's. Your victory is hidden — held with Christ in heaven. Your glory is hidden — stored up for a day with a name. *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* The *simul iustus et peccator* who limped through this age with mixed visibility will be revealed as the saint he always was in Christ. The visible story is not the final story. The hidden life is the real life. Watch the room; this is the paragraph somebody drove here for.

Put to Death: the Sins of Desire

Now the imperatives begin in earnest, and the verb is violent on purpose: *nekrōsate* — put to death, from the root that gives us corpse. Not manage, not moderate, not keep within reasonable limits. Kill. Then connect it immediately to what your class already owns: this is the catechism's daily drowning of the Old Adam. The old self was killed in baptism — that is the left column — and the old self keeps surfacing in daily experience — which is why the right column exists. The believer has died with Christ, *and* the believer daily puts the earthly to death. Both true. That is not a contradiction; that is Tuesday.

Walk the list without flinching and without lingering: *porneia* — the broad term for every sexual relation outside the marriage of one man and one woman; *impurity* — the general defilement; *passion* and *evil desire* — disordered wanting, the *concupiscentia* the Confessions name among the marks of original sin; and then the item with the sting in its tail —

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

When you reach *covetousness, which is idolatry*, open the Large Catechism to the First Commandment and read Luther's definition of a god: *that to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, properly speaking, your god*. Paul and Luther are making the identical move — relocating idolatry from the pagan temple to the wanting heart. The covetous man has no statue on his shelf, but his heart clings to the neighbor's acreage, the bigger account, the life not given — and what the heart clings to is its god. This is why the Reformation taught that the First Commandment is broken before any of the others, and kept only by faith. Say it gently, because it indicts the whole room including the teacher: the most respectable people in the congregation can be the most devout idolaters, and the cure is not a tighter grip on the wallet but a heart re-clung — which is exactly what Word and Sacrament exist to do.

Then the wrath and the relief, in that order because Paul wrote them in that order. *On account of these the wrath of God is coming* — real, sober, no scare tactics. And then the tense that changes everything: *in these you too once walked*. Once. The Colossians belonged to the world under wrath; they have been transferred out of it — Session One's verb, returning right on schedule. The vices are vestiges to be put to death, not a verdict hanging overhead. The putting-to-death is the daily exercise of a freedom already given, not a scramble to escape a wrath still pending.

Put Away: the Sins of Relationship

The second list shifts both image and target. The verb now is the garment-and-tool word — lay aside, strip off, put away — and the sins are no longer the heart curved in on its appetites but the tongue and temper turned against the neighbor: *anger* (the settled disposition), *wrath* (the eruptions it produces), *malice* (the active wishing of harm), *slander* (the speech that wounds reputations, true or false), *obscene talk* — and then the foundation of the whole demolition: *do not lie to one another*. Give lying its weight the way the student book does: when believers lie to one another, the bonds of the body corrode, trust evaporates, and the congregation becomes a theater of pretense. The new self cannot operate where the old habit of lying still runs the room.

Then the observation that keeps this segment gospel rather than pep talk — point at your board when you make it. Notice what Paul does *not* say: get tougher, fight harder, summon more willpower. He says *put them away*, the way you lay down a tool — because the imperative assumes the resources have already been given. The same Christ who nailed the *cheirographon* to the cross supplies the strength to lay down this afternoon's anger. The putting-away is not unaided effort; it is the working-out of what the gospel has already worked in.

Old Self, New Self, Restored Image; Christ Is All

Verses 9 through 11 give the deep grammar under both lists. The clothing language returns from the font: you *have put off* the old self with its practices and *have put on* the new — the baptismal off-and-on, the same image Galatians states outright: *as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. The believer wears Christ now. And the new garment is alive: *being renewed* — present continuous, the Spirit's daily work — *in knowledge*, the *epignōsis* of Paul's opening prayer come full circle, *after the image of its creator*. Let the class hear Genesis 1 underneath, and the hymn above: Christ is the image of the invisible God, and the image defaced in Adam is being restored in those who are his. Then say the Lutheran sentence the student book builds to: sanctification is not the believer's project. It is the Spirit's renewing of the new self that baptism gave — and the believer participates as one receiving, not one producing.

Then the closing declaration, read slowly: *here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all*. One sentence on Scythian is worth the detour — the peoples of the northern steppes, regarded by the Greco-Roman world as the bottom of the human ladder; Paul reaches deliberately for the lowest rung. And then the careful distinction your class needs: the categories are not dissolved — the Jewish believer remains Jewish, the Greek remains Greek, the natural order persists — but they are *dethroned*. They have lost their power to rank anyone's standing before God. Students of *In Christ* will hear Ephesians' one new man under this verse, and they are right to. The shared identity in Christ overrides every other identity at the only tribunal that matters — which, you might observe, is why everyone kneels at the same height at your altar rail.

Gathering the Threads

Gather along the passage's own line: the turn made on a *since*; the seeking and the set mind; the life hidden and kept; the two lists, desire and relationship, both answered from the left column; the old self off, the new self on and being renewed; and every human category bowed before *Christ is all, and in all*. Then close with the student book's final cadence, which is the session's guard against every moralistic misreading — say it over your two columns: All of it is gift. All of it is gospel. All of it is the working out of what Christ has done.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. One, given room, is enough — this session's teaching is full, and the discussion should consolidate the order rather than open six new fronts.

Question 1 — The gospel as source, not reward. The foundation question. Its risk is abstraction; make it concrete: how does Monday morning differ for the person who walks *from* resurrection rather than *toward* it? Listen for the student who has spent decades on the treadmill version — this question can name the exhaustion and retire it.

Question 2 — The hidden life and the unimpressive seasons. The pastoral question, and the deepest of the set. The caregiver, the one whose work was never noticed, the one whose faith feels thin even to himself — verses 3 and 4 are theirs. Receive what surfaces without rushing to brighten it; the comfort here is not that things look better than they seem, but that the real life is *kept*, out of sight, with Christ in God.

Question 3 — Where desire has crossed into worship. The Large Catechism question. Keep it strictly first-person — this is self-examination, not neighbor-examination — and expect the honest answers to be respectable ones: the farm, the portfolio, the children's success, the reputation. The heart clings to good things most dangerously of all.

Question 4 — Which relational sin is most active. The brave question. Keep it confession-shaped rather than gossip-shaped: students name their own anger or slander, never the person who provokes it. If the room hesitates, the teacher goes first, briefly — one sentence of honest example sets the register for everyone.

Question 5 — Remembering baptism daily. The Session Four callback. Push past sentiment toward practice: Luther's morning sign of the cross and invocation, the *I am baptized* answer to the accusing afternoon, the funeral pall as the last word on the off-and-on. The students who took Session Four to heart will do the teaching here.

Question 6 — Categories obscuring the unity. The one most likely to wander into politics, from any direction. Keep the text's own breadth in view — ethnic, cultural, economic, and yes, political — and let the blade cut all ways, as it did in Session Five. Then land it somewhere local and concrete: the communion rail, where the categories kneel side by side at the same height every week, whether they have noticed or not.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question, consider Question 2 — the hidden life. It is the passage's pastoral center, it requires no background, and it ministers directly to the students who most need this session. Question 5 is the strong alternative for a class that lit up at Session Four — it knits the study's sacramental spine to its ethical turn in a single conversation.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ◆ The verb sort — two columns, built by the class. This *is* the session. Never cut it.
- ◆ Verses 3 and 4 — the hidden life, given its full unhurried minutes.
- ◆ Both vice lists named briskly, with the covetousness-as-idolatry line and the *once walked* relief.
- ◆ One discussion question, most likely Question 2.
- ◆ Closing prayer and the Session 7 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ◆ The Psalm 110 background. “Enthroned, as the psalm promised” carries it.
- ◆ The Scythian and barbarian word studies. One sentence on the lowest rung.
- ◆ The vocation excursus at verse 2. One sentence — Session Eight owns this ground.
- ◆ The Galatians put-on-Christ parallel. Name it in passing.
- ◆ The Genesis image-theology at verse 10. “The image defaced in Adam, restored in Christ” is enough.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the order: indicative before imperative, *you have died* before *put to death*, the left column before the right. A student who leaves knowing that the second half of Colossians begins with *since* — and that every command in the Christian life leans on a completed act of God — will never read Christian ethics the same way again, and will be inoculated for life against the religion of the treadmill. Protect the order above everything else in the hour.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ◆ Romans 6:1–14. *Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God* — the fullest parallel statement of the died-once, reckon-daily dynamic, completing the pairing begun in Session Four.
- ◆ Ephesians 4:17–32. The sibling letter's old-self-and-new passage, with its own relational vice list and its own *do not lie* — Colossians 3 in stereo.
- ◆ Psalm 110. *Sit at my right hand* — the enthronement behind verse 1, and the Old Testament text the New Testament quotes more than any other.
- ◆ Genesis 1:26–31. *Let us make man in our image* — the original of which verse 10 announces the restoration.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ Small Catechism, Baptism, Part Four. The Old Adam drowned by *daily contrition and repentance*, the new man daily emerging — verse 5 and verse 10 in the catechism's two sentences.
- ◆ Large Catechism, the First Commandment. *That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, properly speaking, your god* — the key that unlocks *covetousness, which is idolatry*.
- ◆ Formula of Concord, Article VI. The third use of the law — how God's commands guide the regenerate without becoming a ladder — the confessional safeguard for everything this session's right column contains.

- ♦ Small Catechism, the Daily Prayers. Luther's morning and evening rite — the sign of the holy cross and the invocation of the triune name — baptismal remembrance turned into a daily habit your students can begin tomorrow.

Commentaries

- ♦ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH). Excellent on the baptismal grounding of the whole ethical section, and careful with the indicative-imperative structure this session protects.
- ♦ R. C. H. Lenski, *Colossians*. Pastoral and unflinching on both vice lists; Lenski names sins the way a man names weeds in his own garden.
- ♦ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar, Eerdmans). Detailed on the grammar of 3:1-4 — the tenses and the *if* of inference — and thorough on the catalogue vocabulary.

A Final Word

This week you turned the letter's corner without dropping its logic — which is harder than it sounds, and rarer than it should be. Christian ethics taught in the wrong order produces either pride or despair; taught in Paul's order it produces gratitude that gets up and walks. Your two columns are still on the board, and the left one is still entirely God's verbs. Keep it that way for four more weeks.

Next week, the wardrobe. Colossians 3:12-17 dresses the new self piece by piece — *compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience*, and over them all *love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony* — and then gives the Church two of its loveliest commands: *let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts*, and *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*. Verse 16 is the New Testament charter for the singing of the Church, and Lutherans have been cashing that charter for five hundred years. Your students will read 3:12-17 twice before they arrive — and you should bring hymnals. You will want them.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may your life — hidden now with Christ in God — be your quiet confidence until the day of appearing.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION SEVEN

Put On Love

Colossians 3:12–17 · The Wardrobe of the New Self

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Seven — the warm rising after the hard pivot. Last week Paul stripped the old self and laid out what must be put to death and put away; this week he dresses the new self piece by piece: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and over them all love, the bond of perfect harmony. Then come two of the loveliest commands in the captivity letters — *let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts* and *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly* — and the verse Lutheran piety has cherished for five centuries, the New Testament charter for the singing of the Church. You promised hymnals last week. This is the week you keep the promise, because this session does not merely discuss verse 16. It obeys it.

Three cautions. First, warmth can go soft. These five virtues are not niceness, and the student book's treatment of love as the structural bond — without which compassion curdles into condescension and patience into resentment — keeps the hour rigorous; keep that edge. Second, verse 13 will open real wounds. Somebody in your room is carrying an estrangement measured in decades, and *as the Lord has forgiven you* must reach them as gift before it reaches them as demand. Forgiveness releases a real debt because Christ paid it; it does not pretend the offense was unreal, and you should say so plainly. Third, the word *chosen* in verse 12 lands differently on different students. Those formed in Reformed or revivalist settings may carry election as a terror — a hidden decree to be anxiously peered into. The student book hands you the Lutheran correction whole: election preached as gospel, located in Christ, known through the means. Deliver it with its full comfort; for at least one student, it will be the sentence of the study.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Because the Colossians are already God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, they are to dress in the wardrobe of the new self — compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bound into one life by love — bearing with one another and forgiving as the Lord forgave them, with the peace of Christ umpiring the heart's clamoring voices and the word of Christ dwelling so richly among them that it breaks into psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; teach the identity before the imperatives, let the forgiveness flow from the forgiveness received, and end the hour singing, because a class that sings verse 16 has learned it in the only way it can fully be learned.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Session Seven of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ◆ Read Colossians 3:12–17 slowly, several times — and at least once aloud. Mark the two great *let* commands (the peace ruling, the word dwelling) and the thanksgiving that runs through the passage three times: *be thankful... with thankfulness... giving thanks*.
- ◆ Choose the stanza your class will sing. Pick a chorale they know by heart — “A Mighty Fortress” never fails — and have the hymn number ready. The session ends in song, and a teacher fumbling for a number deflates the moment.
- ◆ Review the Small Catechism on the Fifth Petition — *we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment... so we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us*. Verse 13 in the catechism’s voice, and your anchor for the hour’s tenderest minutes.
- ◆ Glance at Formula of Concord XI, at least the Epitome — election considered *in Christ*, preached for comfort, never as a naked decree. Verse 12’s *chosen ones* will need it.
- ◆ Pray — by name, if you know it — for the student carrying the grievance that verse 13 is about to touch.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ◆ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ◆ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ◆ Hymnals — one per student. Promised last week, indispensable this week.
- ◆ Your whiteboard with the seed list and the two columns from Session Six. Today the right column grows — *put on, bear with, forgive, let rule, let dwell, sing* — and the left column, as always, does not change.
- ◆ The garment prop, now in its hour: a clean white garment, and if anyone in your class owns a family christening gown, ask them to bring it. The put-on of verse 12 is baptismal clothing language, and a gown that actually went under the water makes the wardrobe visible.
- ◆ A catechism, flagged at the Fifth Petition.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ◆ **Election is preached as gospel, not terror.** *God's chosen ones, holy and beloved* — *eklektoi*, *hagioi*, and the perfect participle *ēgapēmenoi*, loved and remaining loved. This is not a double decree to be peered into; it is the gracious choosing by which God brings the believer to Christ through Word and Sacrament. The believer who frets over his faltering faith is pointed to the faith itself as the fingerprint of election, and to his baptism rather than behind it. And the identity precedes the ethics: Paul does not say become chosen by putting on these virtues — he says put them on *because* you already are chosen, holy, beloved. The left column, again, comes first.
- ◆ **The five virtues are a portrait, not a checklist.** *Splanchna oiktirmou* — visceral, embodied compassion; *chrēstotēs* — kindness, a word the early Christians heard punning on *Christos*; *tapeinophrosynē* — the very word the false teachers wore as costume in chapter 2, now redeemed into genuine humility; *prautēs* — meekness, the broken horse's strength under the rider's hand; *makrothymia* — the long patience that trusts God's unseen working. Each one answers a vice from last week's lists, and together they describe one face: Christ's. The believer being renewed after the image of his creator is being renewed into exactly these.
- ◆ **Forgiveness flows from forgiveness.** Paul assumes the congregation will be difficult — *bearing with one another* concedes the friction of a community of sinners still being sanctified — and where friction becomes genuine grievance, the answer is *charizomenoi*, grace-shaped forgiving. *As the Lord has forgiven you* carries both senses at once: in the way that, and because. The vertical funds the horizontal — the Fifth Petition's own logic — and the absolution received at the rail is meant to be carried out the door. The grace flows; the believer who blocks the flow blocks the grace.
- ◆ **The Word dwells richly in a singing church.** *Enoikeō* — the Word takes up residence, not a visit; *plousiōs* — richly, like wealth at home in every room of a wealthy house. The dwelling Word produces mutual ministry — *teaching and admonishing one another*, the very verb of Paul's apostolic preaching in 1:28, now distributed to the whole body — and it produces song: psalms, hymns (perhaps including the Christ-hymn of chapter 1 itself), and spiritual songs. Luther wrote chorales and Bach wrote cantatas because verse 16 was taken with full seriousness; the believer who sings the gospel learns it in his bones.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and seed-list review
0:05–0:12	Chosen, holy, beloved: identity before imperatives (v. 12a)
0:12–0:20	The five garments: compassion to patience (v. 12b)
0:20–0:27	Bearing with one another; forgiving as forgiven (v. 13)
0:27–0:33	Above all these, love — the bond (v. 14)
0:33–0:39	The peace of Christ as umpire (v. 15)
0:39–0:48	The word dwelling richly; the singing church (v. 16) — the heart
0:48–0:51	Whatever you do, in the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 17)
0:51–0:57	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:57–1:00	A stanza sung; closing prayer and Session 8 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Two places. First, verse 13 — the forgiveness material carries the session's pastoral weight, and the room will tell you it has landed; do not hurry past whatever surfaces. Second, verse 16 — the singing charter is the heart of the hour and deserves its full nine minutes plus the stanza at the close. If time runs short, compress the Greek of the five virtues and hand verse 17 to next week, which owns its territory anyway.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Chosen, Holy, Beloved: Identity Before Imperatives

Open with the three names, because Paul does. Before a single virtue is commanded, the Colossians are told who they are: *God's chosen ones* — *eklektōi*, the elect; *holy* — *hagioi*, the same word the letter's first verse used of them; *beloved* — *ēgapēmenoi*, a perfect passive

participle, loved and continuing in the loved state. Three names, all of them God's doing. Then make the structural point your board has been making for two weeks: Paul does not say try to become chosen by putting on these virtues. He says put them on *because you already are*. The identity precedes the ethics; the doing expresses the being. Point at the columns.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

The word *chosen* needs two careful minutes, because somewhere in your room it has been a frightening word. Give the class the Lutheran handling whole, the way the student book does. Election in Scripture is preached as gospel, not terror — it is not the double decree of Calvin's heirs, in which God resolves from eternity to damn as well as to save, and it is never a hidden ledger the anxious soul must try to peer into. Formula of Concord XI locates election where it can actually be found: *in Christ*, delivered through the Word and the Sacraments. The believer who wonders whether he is chosen is not sent behind the universe to check; he is sent to his baptism, where God's choosing of him has a date and a font. The faith he frets over is itself the fingerprint of election — you do not trust Christ by accident. Said rightly, *chosen, holy, beloved* stops being an entrance exam and becomes what Paul meant it to be: the believer's three given names. For at least one student, this is the paragraph that retires a lifelong fear.

The Five Garments

Now dress the new self, garment by garment, and keep each one vivid. If a christening gown made it to class, hold it up as you begin: this is put-on language, and the wardrobe was issued at the font.

Compassionate hearts — the Greek is *splanchna oiktirmou*, literally bowels of mercy: not surface pity but the visceral, embodied compassion that moves a person to act, the very quality the Old Testament ascribes to God himself — merciful and gracious, slow to anger. *Kindness* — *chrēstotēs*, and tell the class the pun the early Christians enjoyed: *chrēstos* sounds almost exactly like *Christos*. The kind person is the Christ-like person; kindness is not politeness but the standing disposition to do the neighbor good. *Humility* — *tapeinophrosynē*, and here is a small delight for your attentive students: it is the very word Paul used with a curled lip in chapter 2 for the false teachers' showpiece asceticism. The costume version paraded itself; the genuine article is simply freedom from self-preoccupation — thinking rightly of oneself because one has stopped performing. *Meekness* — *prautēs*, strength under control; the ancients used the word for a horse that had been broken, not weakened but trained, its great power answering the rider's hand. The meek man is not the weak man; his strength serves instead of ruling. *Patience* —

makrothymia, the long-suffering that bears difficulty without complaint and trusts that God is working when the working is invisible.

Then the student book's summary line, worth writing down: these five are not a checklist; they are a portrait. And the face in the portrait is Christ's — which means the list is, in effect, a description of what every baptized person in your room is becoming.

Bearing with One Another; Forgiving as Forgiven

Begin with the concession hiding in plain sight, because it is one of the most pastorally honest assumptions in the New Testament: *bearing with one another* — *anéchomai*, to put up with — presumes that believers will be difficult to live with. The local church is not a community of finished saints; it is a community of sinners being sanctified, and the sanctification is not complete. People will be irritating, slow, and prone to misunderstanding. Paul does not promise a frictionless congregation; he commands love inside the friction of the real one. Say this with a smile, and watch the whole room relax — every person present has been borne with, and knows it.

Then the deeper command, and slow down. Where friction has become genuine grievance — where one believer has actually wronged another — the answer is *forgiving each other*: *charizomenoi*, a verb built on *charis*, grace. Christian forgiveness releases the offender from the debt of the offense — not because the offense was unreal, but because Christ has paid for it. And then the ground of it all: *as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive*. The student book hears the *as* in both of its senses, and both are true: in the way that the Lord forgave you, and because the Lord forgave you. The vertical funds the horizontal. This is the Fifth Petition's own logic — *as we forgive those who trespass against us* — and the Lutheran tradition has drawn the line all the way through the Divine Service: the forgiveness spoken in the absolution, given at the Supper, preached from the pulpit, is meant to be carried out the door and extended as freely as it was received. Close with the student book's sentence, which preaches itself: the grace flows; the believer who blocks the flow blocks the grace.

Above All These, Love

The wardrobe gets its outer garment: *above all these put on love* — *agapē*, the love that wills the good of the beloved without calculating the beloved's worth — *which binds everything together in perfect harmony*. Two Greek words carry the claim: *syndesmos*, the bond, what holds parts together; and *teleiōtēs*, completeness, all the parts working as they should. Love is not the softest item on the list; it is the structural element.

Then give the class the student book's brilliant negative proof, because it is the most clarifying minute of the session: without love, the virtues curdle into their counterfeits. Compassion without love becomes condescension. Kindness without love becomes a way of putting others in one's debt. Humility without love becomes a way of advertising one's

humility. Meekness without love becomes passive aggression. Patience without love becomes resentment with good posture. Every adult in your room has met all five counterfeits — most of us in the mirror — and the diagnosis lands instantly. The other virtues need love at their center or they spoil. That is why it goes on over everything, like a coat.

The Peace of Christ as Umpire

Verse 15 hands you one of the most useful Greek words in the letter: *let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts* — *brabeuō*, from the world of the games: to act as umpire, the official who makes the calls. And the peace doing the umpiring is not a mood; it is *the peace of Christ* — the peace the hymn confessed, *made by the blood of his cross*. Calvary's peace, given a whistle.

Then paint the field the way the student book does, because every student will recognize it: the heart is not a calm place by nature. It is contested ground, with voices clamoring — anger, anxiety, ambition, fear, regret, longing. Paul's command is that when the voices clamor, the peace Christ made gets the deciding call. When the heart wants to lash out, the umpire rules and pulls it back. When it wants to despair, the umpire rules and holds it up. When it wants to grasp, the umpire rules and opens the hand. Add the corporate note — *called in one body*: this peace is not private property; it is meant to show in how the congregation speaks, disagrees, and carries one another. And do not skip the small command that ends the verse: *be thankful* — literally, become thankful, grow the habit. Thanksgiving is the breath of a heart where this peace rules, and the student book's warning is worth quoting: the Christian who has stopped giving thanks has lost the thread of his own gospel.

The Word Dwelling Richly; the Singing Church

The heart of your hour, and five centuries of Lutheran piety lean in with you. Walk the phrases. *The word of Christ* — the gospel, the apostolic teaching, the Scriptures that bear witness to him. *Dwell in you* — *enoikeō*, the verb of God's own indwelling: the Word is to take up residence, not make visits. *Richly* — *plousiōs*, lavishly, the way wealth dwells in a wealthy household: present in every room, available for every purpose. Then the Lutheran landing the student book supplies: this is *sola scriptura* in its true sense — not a denial of tradition but the insistence that the Word of Christ live richly at the center of the believing community as the source from which everything else flows. Where the Word dwells richly, faith is created and sustained. Where it has gone thin — recited but not received, heard but never allowed to settle in — the church withers.

Then the mutual ministry, which deserves a full minute: *teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom*. The verb *noutheteō* is the very word Paul used of his own apostolic preaching back in 1:28 — and here it is handed to the whole congregation. The believers

do for each other, in their life together, what the apostle does in his proclamation: passing the gospel back and forth, calling each other gently back from drift. The Lutheran fathers had a name for this — the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren, which the Smalcald Articles list among the very forms in which the gospel comes to us. Your Bible class, you might point out, is verse 16 happening.

And then the song. Three categories: *psalms* — the Old Testament's inspired hymnbook, which the Church inherited whole; *hymns* — the Church's own compositions of praise, very possibly including the Christ-hymn your class climbed in Session Two; *spiritual songs* — the Spirit-given music of the believing community. The Church that received the Word richly was a singing Church — and no tradition has taken that more seriously than yours. Luther wrote hymns to put the Word of Christ on the people's lips — *Ein feste Burg, Aus tiefer Not* — and two centuries later Bach built cantatas and Passions out of the same conviction. The German Lutheran chorale tradition is what verse 16 produces when it is believed. The believer who sings the gospel learns it in his bones; the Word of Christ dwells more richly in the singer than in the silent hearer.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Do not finish this session without singing. Hymnals out, one stanza, everyone — the chorale you chose in preparation, the one the class knows by heart. No apology, no irony, no “I know this is unusual for Bible class.” Verse 16 is a performative text: it cannot be fully taught, only fully done, and a class that sings it has obeyed it in the act of learning it. Watch what happens in the room — the older saints who carry forty years of hymnody will steady the younger ones, the Word of Christ will be audibly dwelling, and the teaching and admonishing of one another will be happening in four-part harmony whether anyone names it or not. Then tell them what they just did: that was the means of grace, in the mouths of the baptized, exactly as the apostle ordered. No session in this study ends better.

Finish the verse where Paul does: *with thankfulness in your hearts to God*. The singing and the thanking are inseparable — worship without gratitude is performance, and gratitude that never sings eventually goes silent.

Whatever You Do

Verse 17 closes the passage with the widest lens in the letter, and you can hand it to the class in three minutes because next week lives here. *Whatever you do, in word or deed* — the two categories are exhaustive — *do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus*. To act in his name is to act as one who belongs to him, under his authority, for his glory. The merchant's transactions, the parent's discipline, the worker's labor, the citizen's vote, the spouse's tenderness — no compartment of the believer's life escapes the name. This is the

doctrine of vocation pressed to its conclusion: the mother changing a diaper is doing something in the name of the Lord Jesus as fully as the pastor preaching a sermon, because the work is holy when the worker is his. And the verse ends in the passage's home key — *giving thanks to God the Father through him* — the third thanksgiving in six verses, offered through the only mediator there is. Then tell the class where this verse is headed: next week Paul walks it into the rooms of an actual house.

Gathering the Threads

Gather with the passage's own warmth: three given names — chosen, holy, beloved; five garments that portray one face; bearing and forgiving, funded from above; love over everything, lest the virtues curdle; the peace of Calvary umpiring the heart; the Word in residence, breaking into song; and every word and deed under the name of the Lord Jesus, wrapped in thanks. Then close with the student book's own summation, because it ties the session to the volume's title and your class should hear it verbatim: this is what *Christ in you, the hope of glory* looks like when it is being lived.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Choose one and give it air — and whichever you choose, protect the final three minutes for the stanza.

Question 1 — Identity before commands. The consolidating question, retrieving Session Six's order in this passage's warmer key. Press for the Monday-morning difference: how does the day change when *chosen, holy, beloved* is the starting balance rather than the hoped-for verdict?

Question 2 — Which virtue is most lacking. The self-examination question, and the counterfeits are your friend here: students who would never confess impatience will readily confess that their patience has been resentment in good posture. Keep it strictly first-person, and let the put-on language carry the hope — what is lacking is not manufactured but worn.

Question 3 — The person hard to forgive. The live wire, and the deepest question of the set. Guardrails: no names required, ever; forgiveness is not the instant restoration of trust, and it is not pretending the wrong was unreal — it is releasing a real debt because Christ paid it. Do not force resolution inside the hour; some of what this question opens belongs in the pastor's study, and saying so out loud is itself good teaching. The resource, every time, is the forgiveness received — keep pointing there.

Question 4 — The peace as umpire. The practical question. Push past the metaphor to the mechanics: what does the umpire's call actually sound like at 2 a.m.? Usually it sounds

like the Word — a verse held, an absolution remembered, *I am baptized* — and the students who learned that grammar in Session Four will say so.

Question 5 — The Word dwelling, not visiting. The habits question, and a gentle one. Concrete answers are the goal: the table devotion, the hymnal that lives at home and not just in the pew rack, the psalm before bed. “Making the Word more at home” is a renovation every household in the room can start this week.

Question 6 — Where the name is hardest to remember. The vocation question, and a deliberate bridge to next week. The honest answers — the workplace, the checkbook, the political argument — are exactly the rooms the household table is about to walk into. Receive them and promise the follow-through: Session Eight is where this question gets its hour.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If your class is ready for it, choose Question 3 — the unforgiven person. It is the costliest question in the study so far and the one verse 13 was written to reach; handled without hurry, it can begin something the Holy Spirit will finish long after the hour ends. For a gentler session, Question 5 serves beautifully and sends everyone home with homework they can actually do. Either way: end singing.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ♦ Chosen, holy, beloved — with the election-as-comfort paragraph. Two minutes that may retire a lifelong fear.
- ♦ Verse 13 — forgiving as forgiven, with the Fifth Petition. The pastoral center; never rush it.
- ♦ Verse 16 — the Word dwelling richly, and the stanza actually sung. Never cut the singing.
- ♦ One discussion question, most likely Question 3 or Question 5.
- ♦ Closing prayer and the Session 8 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ♦ The Greek of the five virtues. Name all five; keep only the broken-horse image for meekness.
- ♦ The counterfeits litany. One example — patience curdling into resentment — stands for the set.
- ♦ The *brabeuō* background. Keep “umpire”; drop the athletics.
- ♦ Verse 17. One sentence and a promise — next week owns this ground entirely.
- ♦ The Bach material. Lovely when there is time; Luther’s hymns alone carry the point.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the stanza sung — hymnals open, the whole class, the Word of Christ audibly dwelling in the room. Verse 16 is the rare command that can be obeyed inside the hour it is taught, and the obedience *is* the lesson: a class that has sung the gospel together has learned where the Word lives, how it teaches and admonishes, and why the Lutheran church has never stopped singing. Everything else can be compressed. The song cannot.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ♦ Ephesians 5:15–21. The sibling letter’s twin of verse 16 — *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* — with the Spirit’s filling where Colossians has the Word’s dwelling. Read together, the two verses interpret each other.
- ♦ 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. The full anatomy of the *agapē* that binds everything together — and of the counterfeits that remain when it is missing: noisy gongs with impressive résumés.
- ♦ Matthew 18:21–35. The unforgiving servant — ten thousand talents forgiven, a hundred denarii demanded. The vertical-funds-horizontal logic of verse 13, told as a story with an edge.
- ♦ Deuteronomy 7:6–8. *The Lord set his love on you and chose you... because the Lord loves you.* The Old Testament root of *eklektōi*: election grounded in nothing but the electing love itself.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ Formula of Concord, Article XI. Election located in Christ and preached for comfort — the confessional safeguard under *God's chosen ones*, and the answer to every anxious peering behind the decree.
- ◆ Small Catechism, the Fifth Petition. *So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us* — verse 13 as your students memorized it, possibly without noticing what they were promising.
- ◆ Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article IV. The gospel given in more ways than one — preached, baptized, distributed at the altar, spoken in absolution, *and through the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren*. Verse 16's teaching-one-another, confessed as a means by which God comforts his people.
- ◆ Luther's preface to the Babst Hymnal (1545). The Reformer on why redeemed people sing — brief, vigorous, and the charter under five centuries of chorales. Read it and you will never apologize for the stanza again.

Commentaries

- ◆ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH). Especially rich on verse 16 and the passage's liturgical afterlife — the right companion for the session's musical heart.
- ◆ R. C. H. Lenski, *Colossians*. Warm and exact on the five virtues, and pastorally shrewd on the difference between bearing with a brother and excusing him.
- ◆ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar, Eerdmans). Careful on the syntax of verses 16–17 and the three categories of song, for the teacher who wants the grammar settled.

A Final Word

This week you dressed the new self, and you ended the hour with the Word of Christ dwelling audibly in the room — which is more than most Bible classes can say, and exactly what the apostle ordered. If the singing felt like the high point of the study so far, trust the feeling. It was not a flourish on the teaching; it was the teaching, arriving in the form Paul prescribed.

Next week requires your steadiest hand. Colossians 3:18–4:1 is the household table — the *Haustafel* — where the gospel walks into the actual rooms of an actual house: husbands and wives, parents and children, servants and masters. No passage in the letter is more carefully framed by Paul, and none is met with more suspicion by modern readers, which

makes the teaching both delicate and deeply worth doing. Your students will read 3:18–4:1 twice before they arrive, noticing two things: that Paul addresses *both* members of every pair — the one holding power as searchingly as the one under it — and that the phrase *in the Lord* tolls through the passage like a bell. Prepare with charity, and with your own household honestly in mind.

May the Lord bless your teaching — and may the peace of Christ, made by the blood of his cross, sit as umpire in your heart all week, ruling every clamoring voice in favor of the gospel.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION EIGHT

In the Lord

Colossians 3:18–4:1 · The Household Table

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Eight — the session that asks for your steadiest hand. The household table is at once the most ordinary passage in the letter and the most difficult: ordinary because it addresses marriage, parenthood, and work — the three most basic relationships of human life — and difficult because the way Paul addresses the third pair has been the source of real pain in the history of Christian reading. The student book meets all of it head-on, including a full section of historical and theological honesty about slavery, and your task this week is to teach the whole passage the way the book does: patiently, without flinching, and without letting anyone in the room weaponize a word of it.

Three pastoral realities will be sitting in your chairs before you say anything. First, someone in your class is in a hard marriage — possibly a harsh or abusive one — and the qualification *as is fitting in the Lord* must be taught aloud, not whispered: the student book is explicit that submission to cruelty is not the submission Paul commands, and that the orders of creation are God's gift, never weapons against the weak. Say it plainly, and know how to put a hurting student in touch with your pastor. Second, someone in your room was raised by a provoking father — or was one — and verse 21 will land with weight; let it. Third, the slavery question is coming, possibly with heat, and the worst response is evasion. The student book's "A Word About Slavery" equips you completely; teach it as written. One final caution: this passage attracts culture-war energy from every direction. Paul's own frame — vocation, both parties addressed, everything bolted *in the Lord* — is your lane. Stay in it, and the hour will do its quiet, substantial work.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

The gospel walks into the three most ordinary relationships of human life — marriage, parenthood, and labor — and reshapes each one from the inside, addressing both members of every pair and laying the heavier word on the stronger party, bolting every command to the Lord, dignifying the lowest work as service rendered to Christ, and quietly planting, in the words to bondservants and masters, the brother-relationship that would one day make the institution of slavery impossible; teach the frame before the commands and the honesty alongside the text, and the table becomes what Paul wrote it to be — gospel for every station in the room.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Session Eight of the student book carefully, at least twice — and read “A Word About Slavery” twice on its own. You will be teaching its argument nearly verbatim, and it must be in your bones, not on your notes.
- ◆ Read Colossians 3:18–4:1 aloud with a pencil, circling every reference to the Lord. There are seven in nine verses. You will be giving this exercise to the class.
- ◆ Read Philemon — all twenty-five verses; it takes three minutes. It was written at the same desk as Colossians, it is the live demonstration of what this passage sets in motion, and it is the final volume of this series. You will quote it this week.
- ◆ Open the Small Catechism to the Table of Duties and notice what is printed there. Luther built this very passage into daily Lutheran piety, and you will be showing the class.
- ◆ Review the explanation of the Fourth Commandment — *honor, serve, and obey them, love and cherish them* — the catechism’s frame for the children-and-parents pair.
- ◆ Pray for the households represented in your class — the strained marriages, the worn parents, the workers under unworthy masters — and pray for the wisdom to know which conversations this session opens that belong afterward in the pastor’s study.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ◆ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ◆ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.

- ◆ Your whiteboard with the seed list and the two columns. The right column grows again today — *submit, love and do not be harsh, obey, do not provoke, work heartily, treat justly and fairly* — and the left column, holding it all up, does not change.
- ◆ Small Catechisms, opened or flagged at the Table of Duties. The catechism is this week's prop: your students are about to discover that the passage they came to study has been in their confirmation book all along.
- ◆ Nothing theatrical this week. The passage's gravity does not want a prop, and the restraint is itself a teaching decision.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ◆ **Vocation and the orders of creation.** The Reformers spoke of three estates God has ordained for human flourishing — the *oeconomia* (household and work), the *politia* (civil order), and the *ecclesia* (the Church) — not human inventions but God's structuring of human life. Ordinary life is therefore not a problem the gospel solves by escape; it is the theater where the gospel is lived. Every station — father, mother, spouse, child, worker, employer, citizen — is a calling. And the table is not a timeless social blueprint to be imitated in every detail; it is the gospel shown inhabiting the stations of a first-century world.
- ◆ **Both parties addressed — and the heavier word to the strong.** Ancient household codes instructed only the subordinate party; the dominant party's authority needed no comment. Paul breaks the pattern in every pair: the husband is commanded more searchingly than the wife, the father more demandingly than the child, the master more searchingly than the slave. The gospel does not merely reinforce existing hierarchies; it reaches into them and reshapes them from the dominant side. And the headship it leaves standing is the headship of the cross — the wife who submits *as is fitting in the Lord* is responding to a man who has already made himself her servant, and where a husband turns harsh or abusive, the submission Paul commands has ceased to apply. The orders are God's gift; they are not weapons against the weak.
- ◆ **The lowest work, rendered to the highest Master.** The bondservant is freed from *eye-service* and *people-pleasing* into *sincerity of heart*, working *heartily, as for the Lord and not for men* — and then Paul reverses the most legally definitive marker of Roman slavery: the slave, who could not inherit on earth, *will receive the inheritance from the Lord. You are serving the Lord Christ*. And the master is reminded that he, too, is a slave — of a *Master in heaven* — before whom there is *no partiality*. The social difference dissolves into the deeper fact that both are servants of the same Lord.
- ◆ **The gospel as slow corrosive.** Paul addresses the institution he found; he does not endorse it, bless it, or build a theology to defend it — and what his words set in motion

is visible in Philemon, where Onesimus goes home *no longer as a bondservant but... as a beloved brother*. The brother-relationship has the longer reach, and the abolitionists eighteen centuries later — the Wilberforces, the Frederick Douglasses — were not departing from the apostolic gospel but drawing out what it implied: the slave is a brother; the brother cannot be owned; the institution cannot stand where the brother-relationship is real. Roman slavery and American racial chattel slavery were not the same institution — both were evil, the ownership of any human being violating the image of God — and the verses that regulated the first were weaponized to justify the second in ways Paul never imagined and would not have countenanced. The two-kingdoms frame names how this works: the gospel creates the new humanity, and its implications work through the temporal order, sometimes across generations — a work that continues wherever slavery persists today.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and seed-list review
0:05–0:12	The frame: vocation, the orders, and who gets addressed
0:12–0:20	Wives and husbands: in the Lord (vv. 18–19)
0:20–0:27	Children and fathers: lest they lose heart (vv. 20–21)
0:27–0:36	Bondservants and masters: as for the Lord (3:22–4:1) — the heart
0:36–0:44	A word about slavery: the honest reckoning
0:44–0:48	The Table of Duties: your catechism already knew
0:48–0:56	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:56–1:00	Closing prayer and Session 9 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Two places are non-negotiable. First, the frame — both parties addressed, the heavier word to the strong, every command bolted to the Lord; a class that misses the frame will mishear every verse that follows. Second, the word about slavery — never skipped, never rushed; the session's integrity depends on the honesty getting its full eight minutes. If time runs short, compress the Greek vocabulary and the Ephesians cross-reference; never compress these two.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

The Frame: Vocation, the Orders, and Who Gets Addressed

Do not read a single command until the frame is built; this is the most important ten minutes of the session. Begin with the Lutheran lens the student book supplies: the doctrine of vocation and the orders of creation. God has ordained three estates for human flourishing — the household (*oeconomia*), the civil order (*politia*), and the Church (*ecclesia*) — and the Christian is called to live faithfully within all three. This means ordinary life is not a problem for the gospel to solve by escape; it is the theater where the gospel is lived. The believer does not leave the family, the shop, or the township to live the Christian life; he lives it precisely there. And the table is not a timeless social blueprint to be reproduced in every cultural detail; it is the gospel shown entering the actual stations of a first-century household.

Then the structural discovery, and let the class make it themselves.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Before any teaching on any pair, have the class scan the whole passage and answer one question: who does Paul address? Let them find it — wives *and* husbands; children *and* fathers; bondservants *and* masters. Then tell them why this is astonishing: ancient household codes addressed only the subordinate party — the wife, the child, the slave — instructing them in their duties to those above; the party holding power was assumed to need no instruction at all. Paul breaks the pattern in all three pairs, and more than that: in every pair, the heavier moral weight falls on the stronger party. The husband's charge is tougher than the wife's; the father's more demanding than the child's; the master's more searching than the slave's. The gospel does not rubber-stamp existing hierarchies — it reaches into them and reshapes them from the dominant side. A class that discovers this before hearing a single command cannot weaponize the passage afterward, and a class that never sees it will mishear everything. Then add the second discovery: have them circle the Lord-references — seven in nine verses. No relationship in this table floats free; every joint is bolted to the Lord. Frame built. Now read the commands.

Wives and Husbands: In the Lord

Take the pairs in Paul's order, and take the vocabulary honestly. *Submit* — *hypotassō*, to arrange oneself under, to take one's place within an ordered relationship. The student book clears the misreadings immediately, and so should you: it does not mean to be crushed, to be silent, or to have no will of one's own; it names a voluntary placing of oneself — a gift the wife offers in the marriage, not a result of force. And the framing clause carries real freight: *as is fitting in the Lord*. The submission Paul commands is not unlimited, not unconditional, not free-floating; it is shaped, oriented, and qualified by the Lord whose own self-giving defines what covenant love looks like. Students of *In Christ* will remember that Ephesians 5 develops the full analogy — the wife's response patterned on the Church's, the husband's love on Christ's, *who loved the church and gave himself up for her*; Colossians compresses, but the same theology stands underneath.

Then the husband's command, which in its ancient context is the shocking one: *love your wives* — *agapē*, the letter's word for self-giving love that does not calculate the beloved's worth — *and do not be harsh with them*. The Greek behind *harsh* — *pikrainō* — means to make bitter, to wield one's authority as a weapon. Greco-Roman codes never talked to husbands this way; the wife's submission was assumed and the husband's love was nobody's business. Paul commands both, and the husband's is the more searching. The Lutheran reading holds the whole picture together: the headship is real, and it is the headship of the cross, not of domination — and the wife who submits *as is fitting in the Lord* is

responding to a man who has already made himself her servant. Two commands, taken together, describe a marriage in which neither party is exploited and both flourish.

And then say aloud what the student book refuses to leave implicit, because somebody in your room needs to hear the teacher say it: the passage assumes a husband who is loving and not harsh. Where a husband has become harsh or abusive, the wife's submission is not absolute — she is not commanded to remain in danger, to submit to sin, or to be destroyed by cruelty. Submission to conduct that has stopped being *fitting in the Lord* is no longer the submission Paul commands. The orders of creation are God's good gift; they are not weapons to be wielded against the weak. Say it plainly, pause, and move on — the plainness is the protection.

Children and Fathers: Lest They Lose Heart

The second pair moves quickly but cuts deep. *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord* — *hypakouō*, to listen-under; and notice the reason given: not social convenience, not household efficiency, but the Lord's own pleasure. This is the Fourth Commandment's territory, and your students memorized its explanation — *honor, serve, and obey them, love and cherish them*. Add the standing qualification the Church has always held: *in everything* does not include commands to sin; where a parent would require the violation of God's commandments, God is obeyed rather than men. Within the ordinary range of the household — discipline, formation, work, study — the obedience is to be wholehearted.

Then the fathers, and slow down, because the student book calls this one of the most pastoral verses in the captivity letters and it is about to prove it in your room. *Fathers, do not provoke your children* — *erethizō*, to exasperate, to push beyond endurance — *lest they become discouraged* — *athymeō*, to lose heart, to be broken in spirit. Paul knows what carelessly used paternal authority does: the harsh word that lingers for decades, the criticism never balanced by affirmation, the standard that can never be met, the discipline that serves the father's anger rather than the child's good. The child raised under such fathering loses heart — and the student book's quiet sentence deserves to be read aloud: the father may not see what he has done; the child carries it for life. Then the balance: parents hold real authority, placed in their station by God, and they are to use it — for the child's good, answerable to the God who gave it. Somebody in your room is hearing a description of his childhood, and somebody else is hearing a description of his fathering. Let the verse do both works, and trust the gospel on the board to catch whoever it cuts.

Bondservants and Masters: As for the Lord

The third pair is the hardest and gets the longest walk — the heart of the hour. Set the scene honestly: *douloi* here means actual slaves in the Greco-Roman sense — persons

whose labor and bodies were another's legal property — and by some estimates a third or more of major cities were enslaved. In the congregation at Colossae, slaves and masters almost certainly worshiped side by side, and Paul addresses both — using, your sharper students will notice, the very word he applied in chapter 1 to himself, Timothy, and Epaphras as *fellow servants* of Christ.

To the bondservants: obey *in everything* (the same implicit limit as before — where the master commands sin, the higher Lord is obeyed), and then the deeper transformation of the work itself. Not *eye-service* — *ophthalmodoulia*, a word Paul may have coined for work done only under supervision — and not as *people-pleasers*, but *with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord*. And then the verse that two thousand years of Christians in every station have carried into their workplaces: *whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men*. The earthly master may be unworthy of the labor he receives; the heavenly Master is not, and it is to him the labor is actually rendered.

Then the two extraordinary claims, and make sure the class feels their force. *Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward* — and in the Roman world, a slave's defining legal incapacity was precisely that he could not inherit. Paul takes the most legally definitive marker of slavery and reverses it: the man who cannot be an heir on earth is an heir of heaven. *You are serving the Lord Christ* — the household's bottom rung, relocated to the service of the cosmos's enthroned Lord. Then the leveling word — *there is no partiality* — and the address to the masters: *treat your bondservants justly and fairly* — the right and the equitable, both commanded — *knowing that you also have a Master in heaven*. The earthly master is himself a slave of the Lord, holding delegated authority for which he will answer. Before that Master, the social difference between the two men kneeling at the same Colossian table dissolves into the deeper fact that both are servants of Christ. The student book's summary is exact, and you should quote it: the category of *brother in Christ* has been laid alongside the category of *master and slave* — and the brother-relationship has the longer reach.

A Word About Slavery: the Honest Reckoning

Do not skip this, do not rush it, and do not wait for a student to force it — raise it yourself, the way the student book does, because the honesty is the teaching. These verses have been weaponized through history in ways Paul could not have foreseen; American slavery in particular drew on them to justify a brutal racial chattel system that Paul never imagined and would not have countenanced. Three careful moves, in the book's order.

First, the historical distinction, stated without softening anything: Roman slavery and American slavery were not the same institution — and both were evil, because the ownership of one human being by another is intrinsically a violation of the image of God in the enslaved person. Roman slavery was not racial; freed slaves could become citizens; many slaves held legal personhood, owned property, and could in some cases purchase

freedom; some were better educated than their masters. None of that made it good. But it was structurally different from hereditary racial chattel slavery built on a claim of inferior nature, with no personhood and almost no path out.

Second, what Paul actually does: he addresses the institution he found. He does not endorse it, does not bless it, does not construct a theological defense of it. He tells Christian slaves and Christian masters what the gospel does inside the relationship they are in fact in — and binds both to the same Lord.

Third, what his words set in motion — and here you reach for the letter on the same desk. Onesimus, a slave who ran from his Christian master Philemon, met Paul in this very imprisonment and was converted; and Paul sends him home with a letter asking Philemon to receive him *no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother... receive him as you would receive me*. Paul never commands manumission — and writes a letter that makes anything else almost impossible to imagine. The gospel, the student book says, was a slow corrosive on the institution from within: it did not topple slavery in Paul's generation, but it laid down the principles that, eighteen centuries later, the Christian abolitionists — the Wilberforces, the Frederick Douglasses — drew out rather than departed from. Give the class the three-sentence logic to keep: the slave is a brother. The brother cannot be owned. The institution cannot stand where the brother-relationship is real. Frame it, finally, with the two kingdoms: the Church's task is preaching the gospel that creates the new humanity, and the new humanity's implications work through the temporal order, sometimes across generations — a work not finished, since slavery persists today in trafficking and coerced labor, and Christians who fight it are doing what Paul began here. Then tell the class the series' own secret: the little letter to Philemon is this study's fourth volume, and Session Ten will hand them the bridge to it.

The Table of Duties: Your Catechism Already Knew

End the teaching with a small, delightful unveiling.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

Hand out the catechisms and have the class turn to the Table of Duties — and let them discover that the passage they have spent this hour studying is printed there, station by station: husbands, wives, parents, children, workers, employers, each with its Scripture. Luther took the apostolic household tables and built them into the daily piety of every Lutheran home, so that the plowboy and the housewife would know their ordinary stations as holy callings with Bible verses attached. This is the doctrine of vocation in its most portable form, and it has been riding in your students' confirmation books since they were thirteen. The two addresses of Session One — *in Christ* and *at Colossae* — have just been furnished, room by room. A class that closes the hour holding the Table of Duties knows exactly what the Lutheran church did with Colossians 3:18–4:1: it gave it to the laity, and called their lives holy.

Gathering the Threads

Gather along the table's own rooms: the frame — three orders, both parties, the heavier word to the strong, seven bolts to the Lord; the marriage where headship wears the shape of the cross and the weak are never its target; the children whose obedience pleases the Lord and the fathers warned against breaking hearts; the worker whose lowest labor is rendered to the highest Master and the master who has a Master; and the honest word about the institution the gospel outlasted. Then the student book's vocational summation, which belongs to every person in your room: the mother is not less of a Christian than the missionary, the worker not less than the pastor — the believer in the most ordinary station is doing holy work when he does it as for the Lord. Mark the seed list, and close.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. One, given room, will serve; this session's teaching is long and its discussion can run hot, so choose with your particular room in mind.

Question 1 — Vocation and the holiness of daily work. The warm question, and the one that dignifies everyone present. Press for particulars — the dairy barn, the classroom aide's desk, the night shift — and guard against the quiet assumption that “real” ministry happens elsewhere. The Table of Duties in their hands is the rebuttal.

Question 2 — Both parties addressed. The structural question; let students articulate the discovery the teaching hour staged. The payoff sentence to fish for: the gospel reshapes hierarchies from the dominant side.

Question 3 — The heavier word to the strong. The counter-reading question, and a pastoral one: students wounded by weaponized versions of this passage may speak here. Receive what surfaces without defensiveness — the text itself is the correction, and the abuse qualification you taught aloud is the safety rail. Do not let anyone in the room re-weaponize a verse in rebuttal.

Question 4 — Work as for the Lord. The most universally applicable question of the set. The honest answers — the unappreciated job, the unworthy boss, the work nobody sees — are exactly what verses 23–24 were written for; keep pointing at the inheritance reversal and at *you are serving the Lord Christ*.

Question 5 — The gospel as slow corrosive. The slavery question, given a discussion frame. Expect the hard version — *why didn't Paul just condemn it?* — and answer with the book's logic rather than improvisation: addressed without endorsement, the brother-relationship planted, Philemon as demonstration, abolition as harvest, the two kingdoms as the frame. Keep the conversation on the gospel's working, not on relitigating anyone's preferred grievances about history; the blade, as ever in this study, cuts all directions.

Question 6 — The orders under strain. The broad closer — household, civil order, and Church, all visibly strained in the present moment. Apply the Session Five discipline: let the class name strains from every direction, and land on what the gospel reaching in actually looks like — which, on this passage's evidence, looks like Christians keeping their stations faithfully, in the Lord.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question, consider Question 4 — work as for the Lord. It reaches every station in the room, it requires no background, and it sends your students into Monday with their labor consecrated. But read your room: if the slavery material has visibly stirred the class, take Question 5 instead and give it the full time. A hard question addressed openly builds more trust than a comfortable question completed — and this is the session where that trust is won or lost.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ◆ The frame — both parties addressed, the heavier word to the strong, the seven Lord-bolts. Never cut this; everything else depends on it.
- ◆ The abuse qualification at verses 18–19, said aloud. One minute that protects someone in your room.
- ◆ Verses 23–24 with the inheritance reversal — the dignity of every station.
- ◆ The word about slavery, at three minutes minimum: addressed without endorsement; the brother cannot be owned; abolition drew out the gospel. Never skip this.
- ◆ One discussion question, and the Session 9 assignment.

Cut or Compress

- ◆ The Greek vocabulary. Keep the meanings — arrange-under, make-bitter, exasperate, eye-service — and drop the words.
- ◆ The Ephesians 5 development. One sentence pointing the alumni to the fuller treatment.
- ◆ The Roman-slavery sociology. Two sentences carry the distinction.
- ◆ The three-estates terminology. “Household, civil order, Church” needs no Latin in a hurry.
- ◆ The Table of Duties unveiling. Hold up the catechism, name the page, assign it as the week’s reading.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the frame spoken whole: every command in this table is bolted to the Lord, both members of every pair are addressed, and the heavier word falls every time on the stronger party. A class that holds those three facts cannot weaponize this passage against the weak and cannot dismiss it as a relic — they will hear it as it was written: the gospel furnishing the rooms of an ordinary house. Protect the frame above everything else in the hour, including the clock.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ◆ Ephesians 5:22–6:9. The sibling letter's fuller household table, with the Christ-and-Church analogy developed at length — the theology compressed in Colossians, written out in full.
- ◆ Philemon. All twenty-five verses — the same prison, the same courier, and the household table's third pair turned into a living case study. This series' final volume, and worth reading now for the foretaste.
- ◆ 1 Peter 2:18–3:7. The other great apostolic household code, written to believers under far harsher conditions — familiar ground for students of this series' predecessor.
- ◆ Genesis 2:18–25. Marriage as creation order — *bone of my bones* — the estate the table's first pair inhabits, instituted before the fall and carried through it.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ Small Catechism, the Table of Duties. This passage, station by station, in every Lutheran home since 1529 — the week's essential reading, and the hour's best prop.
- ◆ Large Catechism, the Fourth Commandment. Luther's longest treatment of any commandment: parents and all authorities as God's masks, honored in their office and answerable for it.
- ◆ Augsburg Confession, Article XVI. Civil affairs and ordinary stations affirmed as God's good order — Christians may marry, hold office, own property, engage in lawful callings — the confessional charter of vocation.
- ◆ Martin Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522). Bracing, funny, and tender — Luther on the diaper-washing father whom God and the angels smile upon. The dignity of the household estate, from its great defender.

Commentaries

- ◆ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH). Steady and confessional on the household table, with the orders of creation handled as gift rather than embarrassment.
- ◆ R. C. H. Lenski, *Colossians*. Plainspoken pastoral exposition of all three pairs; his pages on fathers and discouraged children still sting usefully.
- ◆ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar, Eerdmans). Excellent background on the *Haustafel* form and the most thorough treatment of the slavery

material — and his Philemon commentary, bound in the same volume, previews this series' final study.

A Final Word

This week you taught the passage most likely to be mishandled in the whole letter, and you taught it whole: the frame before the commands, the heavier word to the strong, the protection spoken aloud for the weak, and the honest reckoning given its full minutes. That is not a small achievement. Most of your students live these verses in complete obscurity — the wife, the worn father, the worker under an unworthy boss — and today their stations were called holy with a catechism in their hands to prove it.

Next week is the gentlest hour of the study, and it arrives on schedule after a heavy one. Colossians 4:2-6 is brief — prayer, watchfulness, the apostle asking for an open door for the word, and the most quotable counsel on Christian speech in the captivity letters: *let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt*. Your students will read 4:2-6 twice before they arrive, noticing how Paul links prayer for the gospel's advance with the believer's own everyday speech to outsiders. And keep one seed in your pocket as you close: two sessions remain, and when the final greetings arrive in Session Ten, a runaway slave named Onesimus will walk into them — and today's hardest teaching will be waiting for him.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may you keep your own stations this week — whatever they are — heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION NINE

Walk in Wisdom

Colossians 4:2–6 · Prayer, the Open Door, and Salted Speech

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Nine — by design the gentlest hour of the study, arriving exactly when your class needs it. After the doctrinal summits of the early sessions and the household table's heavy lifting last week, Paul gives the Colossians five quiet verses of marching orders for the ordinary day: pray steadily, pray for the missionaries, walk wisely among outsiders, buy up the time, and let your speech be gracious, seasoned with salt. Five verses is not much text, and that is the gift. Do not pad the hour, and do not borrow from next week's greetings to fill it. Let this session breathe — there is room this week to actually pray, to actually talk, and to send the study outward.

Three cautions. First, evangelism guilt. Many faithful Lutheran adults carry a low-grade shame about “not witnessing enough,” usually instilled by traditions that measure faith in cold-call conversations. This passage is the antidote, not another dose: Paul prescribes no script, no quota, no ambush techniques — gracious salted speech and attention to the *each person* God has already placed in reach. Teach it as liberation, or you will have taught it wrongly. Second, prayer talk slides easily into technique talk or fresh guilt about prayerlessness. Notice with the student book what Paul does *not* say — no postures, no formulas, no schedules — and then hand the class the scaffold the Church already gave them: the catechism's daily prayers, the Litany, the liturgy. Third, the material on outsiders must stay warm. The two kingdoms describe a posture of wise, neighborly presence — not a fortress mentality. Outsiders in this passage are neighbors to be loved and answered, not threats to be managed.

One administrative note that matters more than it looks: next week is Session Ten, and it has an appointment with the first hour of this study. Find your Session One notes this week — the recorded round of hopes your class shared in the opening session. They are about to be needed.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

Paul closes the letter's instruction with marching orders for the ordinary day — prayer continued steadfastly, watchful and thankful, without a single technique prescribed; intercession for the apostle in chains, that God would open a door for the word and give him clarity rather than brilliance; wisdom toward outsiders and the buying-up of unrepeatable time; and speech always gracious, seasoned with salt, discerning enough to answer each particular person — and the whole cluster turns the study outward, sending nine weeks of received gift into the conversations of daily life, one neighbor at a time, with no script required.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Session Nine of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ◆ Read Colossians 4:2–6 slowly, several times — and at least once aloud. Five verses; you have time to read them three times. Mark the chain of participles in verse 2 and the two purposes: *that God may open... that I may make it clear*.
- ◆ Read Luther's *A Simple Way to Pray* — written in 1535 for his barber, Master Peter, who asked the Reformer how to pray. It is short, practical, and this week's centerpiece from the tradition; you will be commending it by name.
- ◆ Review the Small Catechism's Morning and Evening Prayers, and the explanation of the Eighth Commandment — *defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way*. Both come into the teaching hour.
- ◆ Read 1 Peter 3:13–17 — *always being prepared to make a defense... yet do it with gentleness and respect* — the closest New Testament cousin of verse 6, on familiar ground for students of this series' predecessor.
- ◆ Find your Session One notes — the round of hopes your class recorded in the first hour. Session Ten reads them back, and this is the week to locate them.
- ◆ Pray for the *each persons* in your students' lives — the unnamed coworkers, neighbors, and family members this session is about to put on index cards.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ◆ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ◆ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.

- ◆ Your whiteboard with the seed list and the two columns. The fifth seed — the faithful labor of handing the gospel on — gets visible watering this week; its full flower comes in seven days. The right column grows: *continue in prayer, be watchful, pray for us, walk in wisdom, redeem the time, let your speech be gracious*.
- ◆ A salt shaker, set on the table where everyone can see it from the first minute. The simplest prop of the study, and it will do its work without a word until verse 6.
- ◆ One index card per student, held back until the final teaching segment.
- ◆ A catechism, flagged at the Daily Prayers and the Eighth Commandment.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ◆ **Prayer is the breath of the baptized, and no techniques are prescribed.** *Continue steadfastly* — *proskartereō*, the verb of the early Church's devotion in Acts 2 — in the present continuous: keep on persisting. And note what Paul does not supply: no postures, formulas, or appointed hours. Prayer is not the believer twisting God's arm; it is the exercise of his standing as one whom God has addressed first and invited to answer. The Father bids his children ask; the asking is how the relationship breathes. And the means of continuing have already been given — the catechism's daily prayers, the Litany, the prayers of the Divine Service. The believer does not invent his prayer life from nothing; he uses what the Church has handed him.
- ◆ **Watchful and thankful is the basic Lutheran posture.** *Grēgoreō* carries both of Jesus' senses — stay awake (Gethsemane) and watch for the master's return (the unknown hour) — and watchfulness is not anxiety: the praying believer simply sees more — the forming temptation, the neighbor's need, the opportunity for love that the distracted man walks past. Prayer wakes the believer up. And the watchfulness is paired, for the third time in the letter, with *eucharistia* — the thanksgiving that names the Lutheran sacrament and defines the Lutheran life. Watchful, with thanksgiving: the believer's standing posture before God.
- ◆ **The apostle in chains asks for prayer — and for clarity, not brilliance.** *Pray also for us*: Paul does not stand above the body's intercession; he depends on it. The requested content is exact — *a door for the word, the mystery of Christ* declared (the letter's mystery, returning for its final bow before next week), and the admission that surfaces the chains explicitly: *on account of which I am in prison*. The gospel that gave the Colossians their hope of glory cost the apostle his liberty — and from the cell he asks not for release but *that I may make it clear*. He wants the gospel to land, not his rhetoric to dazzle. Four petitions — the door, the content, the cost, the clarity — and a permanent model for how the Church prays for its ministers.

- ♦ **Wisdom, time, and salt: witness without a script.** *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders* is the two kingdoms in street clothes — the believer at home in the Church and a sojourner in the world, neither withdrawing (the monastic impulse Lutheran theology has always resisted) nor being absorbed. *Making the best use of the time* — *exagorazomenoi ton kairon*, buying up the unrepeatable moment — is not productivity under the lash but the free response of a redeemed heart that knows its days are gifts. And the speech: *always gracious* — *charis*, the gospel's own word — *seasoned with salt*, which both flavors and preserves, keeping conversation from rotting into gossip, cynicism, or empty noise; lively enough to be enjoyed, for the gracious Christian need not be boring. The aim: *to answer each person* — no canned script, but the discernment to match the word to the particular neighbor, with the Eighth Commandment's best construction already most of the way there.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and seed-list review
0:05–0:13	Continue steadfastly: prayer without techniques (v. 2a)
0:13–0:20	Watchful, with thanksgiving (v. 2b)
0:20–0:29	Pray also for us: the door, the mystery, the chains (vv. 3–4)
0:29–0:36	Walk in wisdom; redeeming the <i>kairos</i> (v. 5)
0:36–0:45	Gracious speech, seasoned with salt; the each person (v. 6) — the heart
0:45–0:54	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:54–1:00	Closing prayer — longer than usual, on purpose — and Session 10 assignment

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Two places. First, verses 3 and 4 — the apostle in chains asking a small-town congregation to pray for him is one of the most humbling moments in the letter, and the chain motif your study opened with surfaces here explicitly; give it room. Second, verse 6 and the each-person move — the heart of the hour and the study's turn outward. The whole session is built to move slowly; if time still runs short, compress the *kairos* word study and the two-kingdoms terminology, never the chains and never the card.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Continue Steadfastly: Prayer Without Techniques

Open with the verb and its pedigree: *proskartereō* — to persist, to devote oneself, to hold fast with steady determination — the same word Acts uses for the first Church's devotion to the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Present continuous: keep on continuing. Prayer is to be the believer's steady occupation, not the emergency channel opened when trouble forces it.

Then teach the silence in the verse, because the student book is right that it is striking: Paul gives no techniques. No posture, no formula, no time of day. The Christian life is a life lived in conversation with the God who spoke first — in his Word, at the font — and prayer is simply the answer-side of that conversation, the breath of the relationship. Add the careful Lutheran note: prayer is not a means of twisting God's arm into doing what he would not otherwise do; it is the believer's exercise of his standing as one whom God has addressed and invited to respond. The Father has bidden his children to ask. So they ask. That is how the relationship works.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

Somebody in your room is already thinking *but I don't know how to pray steadily* — so tell them about Master Peter. In 1535, Luther's barber asked the Reformer how an ordinary man should pray, and Luther wrote him a little book: *A Simple Way to Pray*. The method is disarmingly plain — pray through what you already know by heart: the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed — weaving each part into what Luther called a garland of four strands: instruction, thanksgiving, confession, petition. No mysticism, no heroics; the catechism turned into a prayer book, suitable for a man with a razor in his hand and customers waiting. Then widen the point the way the student book does: the believer who wants to obey verse 2 does not need to invent his prayer life from nothing. The morning and evening prayers, the Litany, the collects of the Divine Service — the Church handed your students a scaffold centuries ago. *Continue steadfastly* — and the means of continuing are already in their confirmation books. Commend *A Simple Way to Pray* by name; it is short enough to read this week, and at least one student will.

Watchful, with Thanksgiving

Two marks distinguish the prayer Paul commands. *Watchful* — *grēgoreō*, to stay awake, to keep watch — and give the class both of Jesus' senses, because both are in play: the practical sense from Gethsemane, where Peter, James, and John kept falling asleep, and the eschatological sense — watch, for you do not know the hour. The believer's prayer is alert prayer, awake to what is happening within him and around him, and awake to the fact that the day of the Lord is coming.

Then the correction before anyone hears it wrongly: watchful is not anxious. The believer is not commanded to scan the horizon with dread; he is commanded to keep his eyes open — and the student book's observation here is worth reading aloud: the man who prays watchfully *sees more of his own life* than the man who does not. He sees opportunities for love he would have missed, temptations forming he would have stumbled into, needs of neighbors he would have been too distracted to register. Prayer wakes the believer up. And the second mark is the letter's keynote sounding again: *with thanksgiving* — *eucharistia*, the word that names the sacrament and has been ringing since chapter 1. Thanksgiving is itself a form of prayer, perhaps the deepest; the believer who has stopped giving thanks is praying askew. Watchful, with thanksgiving — tell your class this phrase describes not just a verse but the basic posture of the Lutheran Christian's life with God, from the altar on Sunday through every weekday after.

Pray Also for Us: the Door, the Mystery, the Chains

Slow down here, and let the scene be felt. The apostle Paul — the man whose preaching has planted churches across the Mediterranean, whose letter your class has spent nine weeks climbing — asks a small congregation in a Lycus valley town to pray *for him*. The humility is the teaching: the apostle does not stand outside the body of prayer; he depends on it.

Then the petitions, in their order. *That God may open to us a door for the word* — the marketplace of opportunity, the same image Paul uses of Ephesus, where *a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries*. Small congregations pray empire-sized prayers: the Colossians, from their valley, are to pray doors open across the world for the apostolic word. *To declare the mystery of Christ* — and your class should hear the letter's great word returning for its final appearance before the farewells: the mystery hidden for ages and generations, now revealed, whose content is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. That is what goes through the open doors — not infrastructure, not a moral system, not a culture: the mystery, which is Christ.

On account of which I am in prison. Pause on this clause, because the chains your study began with surface here explicitly, and they are doing theology. The gospel that reached Colossae and gave your students their hope of glory is the same gospel that cost the

apostle his liberty — and the cost has not silenced him; he is writing the very letter you are reading from the cell. Then the final petition, and read it tenderly: *that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Not that I may be released. Not that I may be eloquent.* Clear. The apostle wants to be understood, not admired — the gospel to land, not the rhetoric to dazzle. Close the segment with the student book's application, which your class can put into practice this very week: here is the permanent model for praying for ministers — pray the door, pray the content, pray the cost borne faithfully, pray the clarity. Name your own pastor and your congregation's missionaries while you say it.

Walk in Wisdom; Redeeming the Kairos

Verse 5 turns from the apostolic mission to the believers' own daily conduct. *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders* — *hoi exō*, those outside the believing community — and *sophia* here is practical discernment: knowing what to say and when to be silent, how to live among neighbors who do not yet know the Lord, neither naive nor hostile. Give the class the Lutheran frame in plain clothes: the two kingdoms. The believer is at home in the Church, among brothers and sisters; in the world he is a sojourner — working, trading, voting, coaching the team — alongside people who do not share his deepest convictions. Wisdom is what lets him live there well: not withdrawal into the fortress (the monastic impulse the Reformation refused) and not absorption into the world's frame. Neither porcupine nor chameleon — a wise neighbor, faithful to his Lord and attentive to the people in front of him.

Then the time. *Making the best use of the time* — *exagorazomenoi ton kairon*, literally buying up the time, a marketplace image — and the word is *kairos*: not clock-time but the qualitative moment, the right season, the opportunity that once gone cannot be recovered. The wise believer recognizes such moments — the conversation that opens, the need that surfaces, the occasion for love — and spends himself on them. Then the guard rail the student book builds, and your class needs it said: this is not a command to relentless productivity. The believer is not justified by his output; he is saved by Christ alone — and *therefore* free to spend his unrepeatable days well, not under the lash but in grateful response, because the days are held in love by the Lord who gave them.

Gracious Speech, Seasoned with Salt; the Each Person

The heart of the hour, with the salt shaker finally explaining itself. *Let your speech always be gracious* — and the Greek word is *charis*, grace, the very word the letter has used for the gift-character of the gospel from its first sentence. The believer's speech is to bear the family resemblance of the gospel that remade him: generous in tone, kind in substance, free of cruelty and contempt. Then the diagnostic, gently: where a Christian's words run habitually harsh, sharp, barbed, dismissive — something has gone wrong between his speech and his gospel.

Seasoned with salt — *artyō*, the cooking verb — and salt does two things in a kitchen. It flavors: the bland becomes interesting, the heavy becomes light. And it preserves: what would rot is held back from decay. Christian speech does both — lively enough to be worth hearing, and preservative enough to keep a conversation from rotting into gossip, cynicism, cruelty, or empty noise. Add the delightful note the student book includes: the ancients heard salt as a metaphor for wit, and Paul is not commanding heaviness. The gracious Christian need not be boring; he can have a sense of humor, choose his words well, be the person whose conversation others actually enjoy — and in that enjoyment, the gospel finds soil.

Then the purpose clause, and the liberation in it: *so that you may know how you ought to answer each person*. Each person — *not* every person with the same speech. No canned response, no memorized script: the discernment to match the answer to the particular questioner, this person, this moment, this concern. The Word that has been dwelling richly since chapter 3 surfaces in the conversations of chapter 4 — the Spirit supplying the words when the moment comes. And before you leave the verse, open the catechism one last time this hour: Luther's Eighth Commandment — defend the neighbor, speak well of him, put the best construction on everything. The student book's verdict is exactly right: the Christian whose speech keeps the Eighth Commandment is already most of the way to the speech Paul commands.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Now hand out the index cards. One instruction, given quietly: write one name — the specific outsider already in your orbit; the coworker, the neighbor across the fence, the brother-in-law, the each person. Nobody shares the name. Nobody reports back next week. There is no program, no follow-up form, no accountability scheme — those would turn verse 6 back into the script-evangelism it abolishes. The card goes home in a Bible or a wallet, and the only assignment is the one this whole session has been teaching: pray for that name, watchfully, with thanksgiving, and let the conversations come as God opens them — gracious, salted, attentive to that particular person. This is the moment the study turns outward: nine weeks of received gift, now facing one real human being. Most evangelism programs fail because they aim at everyone; verse 6 aims at each. A class that walks out with one name in a wallet has understood the difference — and has begun.

Gathering the Threads

Gather with the passage's own brevity: pray steadily, watchfully, thankfully — the scaffold already given; pray for the preachers — door, content, cost, clarity; walk wisely among the outsiders; buy up the unrepeatable moments; and let every word be gracious and salted, aimed at the each person. Then close with the student book's final cadence, which frames

next week perfectly — read it slowly: the apostle in his chains has done his part. The Colossians in their ordinary lives are now to do theirs. So, you might add, looking at the cards disappearing into wallets, are we.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. One, well chosen, fills the gentler hour — and remember to protect the unhurried closing prayer; in this session of all sessions, it is part of the curriculum.

Question 1 — What steady prayer looks like; where it is hardest. The honest opener, and guilt will surface — decades of abandoned resolutions and dusty devotionals. Answer the guilt with the scaffold, not with shame: the morning and evening prayers are a ninety-second on-ramp, and Master Peter's garland awaits anyone who wants more. Steadiness, not heroics, is the command.

Question 2 — Praying for ministers and missionaries. The concrete question. Move it from generality to names: your pastor, your district's missionaries, the seminarian your congregation supports. Paul's four petitions — door, content, cost, clarity — make a refrigerator-card intercession any household can adopt this week.

Question 3 — Wisdom toward outsiders. The two-kingdoms question in work boots. Press for real settings — the shop floor, the school board, the co-op — and keep the posture warm: outsiders here are neighbors God has placed in reach, not adversaries to be outmaneuvered. Neither porcupine nor chameleon.

Question 4 — Letting the kairos pass. The distracted-age question; the phones will come up unprompted, and fairly. Keep it gift-shaped rather than productivity-shaped: the issue is not wasted output but unrecognized moments — the conversation that wanted ten more minutes, the visit postponed once too often.

Question 5 — The dominant flavor of your speech. The bravest question of the set: an honest taste-test of last week's words against *gracious* and *salted*. The teacher goes first, briefly and specifically — one confessed flavor (the sarcasm, the sharpness under deadline) sets the register. The Eighth Commandment is the measuring spoon.

Question 6 — Who is your each person. If you did the card move, this question is already underway and needs only a light touch: not the name — never the name — but the situation: what does gracious, salted speech sound like *to that person*? Let the class think concretely about one relationship apiece, and end there; the rest is between them, the name, and God.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you did the index-card move, take Question 6 — it completes what the card began and sends every student home with the study pointed at one real relationship. If your class thrives on honest self-examination, Question 5 is the strong alternative and pairs naturally with the Eighth Commandment. Either way, end with the longer closing prayer the time plan protects: in the prayer session, praying *is* the review.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ◆ Verse 2 with *A Simple Way to Pray*, compressed to Master Peter and the garland. The scaffold answer to the guilt in the room.
- ◆ Verses 3–4 — the apostle asking for prayer, the chains named, clarity over brilliance. The motif your study has been carrying since the first hour.
- ◆ Verse 6 with the index-card move. Never cut the card; it is the study's turn outward.
- ◆ One discussion question, most likely Question 6.
- ◆ The unhurried closing prayer and the Session 10 assignment — including your own homework: find the Session One hopes.

Cut or Compress

- ◆ The Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 16 cross-references. Name them in passing.
- ◆ The *grēgoreō* double sense. Keep “alert”; drop Gethsemane.
- ◆ The *kairos* marketplace etymology. “The unrepeatable moment” carries it.
- ◆ The Roman-wit material at verse 6. Keep “the gracious Christian need not be boring.”
- ◆ The two-kingdoms terminology. Keep the posture — neither withdrawal nor absorption — and drop the vocabulary.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be verse 6 taught as liberation and made personal: Christian witness is not a memorized script delivered at everyone but gracious, salted, discerning speech offered to each person — and your students each carry one actual name home on a card to pray for, watchfully, with thanksgiving. A class that leaves with that has received what this session exists to give: the study, after nine weeks of gift, finally facing outward — one neighbor at a time.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ◆ Matthew 5:13–16. *You are the salt of the earth* — the Lord's own salt-saying, the source spring behind verse 6, with the same double work of flavor and preservation in view.
- ◆ 1 Peter 3:13–17. *Always being prepared to make a defense... yet do it with gentleness and respect* — the apostolic twin of salted speech, written to exiles under pressure; familiar ground for students of this series' predecessor.
- ◆ Acts 2:42–47. The first congregation *devoted* — *proskartereō* — to the teaching, the breaking of bread, and the prayers: verse 2's verb, lived out at the Church's birth.
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 16:8–9. *A wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries* — Paul's door image in its other setting, with the honest note that open doors and opposition arrive together.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray* (1535). The letter to Master Peter the barber — the garland of four strands, the catechism turned prayer book. The week's essential reading, and short enough to finish in an evening.
- ◆ Small Catechism, the Daily Prayers. Morning, evening, and table — the asking-and-thanking rhythm that makes verse 2 a habit instead of a resolution.
- ◆ Large Catechism, the Lord's Prayer, introduction. God has commanded prayer and promised to hear it — Luther's demolition of every "I am not worthy to pray" excuse, and the sturdiest ground for steadfastness ever written.

- ♦ Small Catechism, the Eighth Commandment. *Defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way* — the speech of verse 6, in the explanation your students memorized at thirteen.

Commentaries

- ♦ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH). Warm and practical on this section, with the prayer material handled in full confessional register.
- ♦ R. C. H. Lenski, *Colossians*. Vigorous on watchfulness and pointed on salted speech; Lenski clearly enjoyed verse 6 and it shows.
- ♦ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar, Eerdmans). The careful treatment of *exagorazomenoi ton kairon* and the syntax of verse 6, for the teacher who wants the grammar nailed down.

A Final Word

This week the study turned outward — gently, the way Paul turned it: no scripts, no quotas, just steady prayer, wise walking, and salted speech aimed at one each-person whose name now rides in a wallet. That is evangelism as the captivity letters actually teach it, and your students may be surprised how light it feels. It was always meant to.

Next week the study ends — and it ends with names. Colossians 4:7–18 is the closing greetings, and not one name is filler: Tychicus the courier who carried this very letter; Onesimus the runaway slave walking home into everything Session Eight taught; Epaphras, the founder your class met on his knees in Session One, still *struggling in prayer* for them; Mark, restored; Luke, beloved; Demas, whose silence tells its own story; and at the last, the apostle taking the pen into his own chained hand: *Remember my chains. Grace be with you*. Your students will read 4:7–18 twice before they arrive, paying attention to how Paul names each person — their character, their service, their place in the mission. And your homework stands: find the Session One hopes. They have an appointment.

May the Lord bless your teaching — and may your own speech this week be gracious, seasoned with salt, ready for whoever the each person turns out to be.

Soli Deo Gloria

SESSION TEN

Remember My Chains

Colossians 4:7–18 · The Names, the Signature, and the End of the Study

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Ten — the farewell, and an hour whose teaching task is unlike any of the nine before it. There is no doctrinal summit left to climb; the letter ends the way every ancient letter ended, with a list of names. Your work this week is threefold: teach the names so your students never skim a greetings chapter again, close the frame of chains that your study opened in its first hour, and read back the hopes your class recorded in Session One. You located those notes last week. If you did not, stop reading and find them now — the read-back is the keystone ceremony of the whole study, and it cannot be improvised.

Three cautions for a finale. First, sentimentality. Last sessions drift toward the misty, and this passage will not allow it — Demas is in the text, with his bare, untitled greeting and his sequel in Second Timothy, and he must be taught honestly. The names include one warning, and the warning is part of the gift. Second, do not let the retrospective become a lecture recap. You will be tempted to re-teach ten weeks in ten minutes; resist. The hopes read-back, done slowly over the finished whiteboard, accomplishes everything a summary would and lands where a summary cannot. Third, the pointer to the series' final volume is a gift to extend, not a pitch to deliver — one warm paragraph, and the door left open. You will notice the student chapter has no Looking Ahead section for the first time; your hour ends differently too, and the difference is the point.

THE BIG IDEA IN ONE SENTENCE

The letter closes with the apostolic mission wearing its faces — Tychicus the trusted courier and Onesimus the runaway returning as a beloved brother, the three Jewish coworkers who were medicine to Paul's soul, Epaphras the founder still wrestling in prayer for the valley, Luke who stayed and Demas who would not, Nympha's open doors and Archippus's unfinished ministry — until the apostle takes the pen into his own chained hand and ends where he began, in grace; and the session closes the study the same way, reading back the hopes of the first hour over the finished board, remembering the chains, and speaking the gift-word over the class one last time.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- ◆ Read Session Ten of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- ◆ Read Colossians 4:7–18 aloud, slowly, until every name comes off your tongue with confidence: Tychicus (TIK-ih-kus), Onesimus (oh-NESS-ih-mus), Aristarchus (air-iss-TAR-kus), Epaphras (EP-uh-frass), Archippus (ar-KIP-us). A teacher who stumbles over the names undercuts the session's whole claim that the names matter.
- ◆ Have the Session One hopes in hand — the recorded round from your first hour. Read them over privately before Sunday, and decide the order you will read them in.
- ◆ Read 2 Timothy 4:9–18 — the roll call years later, where the sequels live: *Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me... Luke alone is with me... Get Mark, for he is very useful to me for ministry.* You will be quoting it.
- ◆ Read Philemon once more, all twenty-five verses. Tychicus and Onesimus are about to walk out of your study and into it.
- ◆ Pray for your students by name this week — every one, Epaphras-style. It is the most fitting preparation this session has, and they will never know you did it, which is rather the point.

Materials to Have on Hand

- ◆ Your Bible, ideally a Lutheran Study Bible or one with good footnotes.
- ◆ Copies of the student book for any who do not yet have one.
- ◆ Your whiteboard in its full ten-week glory, restored before class: the seed list with four seeds flowered and the fifth ready to open; the five perfect-tense verbs still parked in the corner — *qualified, delivered, transferred, redemption, forgiveness*; and the two columns, the right one long and the left one exactly as God wrote it.
- ◆ The Session One hopes, on paper, in your pocket.
- ◆ Hymnals, if you wish to close the study the way Session Seven taught — one final stanza is a worthy ending, and “A Mighty Fortress,” stanza four, was practically written for this passage.
- ◆ Information about the series' final volume, *Brother in Christ*, for students who want to continue.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- ◆ **The names are the mission with its faces showing.** It is tempting to skim closing greetings, and it is a mistake: every name stands for a real person who carried letters, hosted churches, shared imprisonments, and prayed wrestling prayers. The Christ-hymn would not have reached the Lycus valley without them; the letter your class has studied for ten weeks exists because Tychicus — beloved brother, faithful *diakonos*, fellow servant — put it into the hands of the church at Colossae. The gospel was, and is, a fellowship of those who carry it together.
- ◆ **Onesimus is the new humanity arriving in person.** The runaway slave returns — not under coercion but as *our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you*. The new identity has overrun the old, and the pairing is its own theology: the trusted aide and the reconciled runaway travel together, carrying the same letter, equally part of the apostolic mission. Session Eight's teaching walks into the room with him — and so does the series' final volume, the little letter he carried about himself.
- ◆ **Epaphras shows the Church its hidden labor.** The founder your class met on his knees in Session One is still there: *always struggling* — *agōnizomenos*, the wrestler's agony, the same *agōn* root Paul used of his own toil in 1:29 and 2:1 — *on your behalf in his prayers*, asking for the very maturity and full assurance Paul prayed for the church. Physically absent, he is present in the most consequential way; and Paul gives him the apostle's own title, *servant of Christ Jesus*. Intercession is labor. The faithful pastor's chief work is done where nobody sees it.
- ◆ **Perseverance, fulfillment, and the signature.** Luke stayed to the end; Demas — bare name, no epithet — would later desert, *in love with this present world*, giving a face to 1:23's *if indeed you continue*: perseverance is required, and not automatic, which is why the gospel is for the whole Christian life and not just its start. Archippus receives the standing charge of every ministry: *fulfill it* — *plēroō*, to completion, not until inconvenient. And then the autograph: the apostle's own hand, three devastating words and three gracious ones. *Remember my chains* — the same hand that traced the Christ-hymn traced the chains, and the two belong together. *Grace be with you* — the letter ends where it began in 1:2, with the gift-word that defines everything else.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

TIME	SEGMENT
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and the full board: seeds, verbs, columns
0:05–0:13	Tychicus and Onesimus: the courier and the brother (vv. 7–9)
0:13–0:20	Aristarchus, Mark, Justus: comfort and reconciliation (vv. 10–11)
0:20–0:27	Epaphras: wrestling in prayer (vv. 12–13)
0:27–0:32	Luke and Demas: the one who stayed, the one who left (v. 14)
0:32–0:37	Nympha, the circulating letters, Archippus (vv. 15–17)
0:37–0:44	The autograph: Remember my chains; grace (v. 18) — the heart
0:44–0:51	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:51–1:00	The hopes read back; the study gathered; closing prayer

WHERE TO SLOW DOWN

Two places. First, verse 18 — the autograph closes the frame your study opened ten weeks ago, and the chains deserve their full unhurried minutes. Second, the read-back — nine minutes are protected for it at the end, and nothing in the hour is permitted to eat them. If time runs short, compress Aristarchus's travel history and the Laodicean-letter question; never the chains, and never the hopes.



Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Tychicus and Onesimus: the Courier and the Brother

Open the hour with the student book's defense of the passage, because half your class skimmed it on first reading and the apology will win them back: closing greetings feel like housekeeping, and they are not. These names are the apostolic mission with its faces showing — the real people who carried letters, hosted churches, and bore the gospel's cost in particular bodies in particular places. The hymn of Session Two did not float to the Lycus valley; people walked it there. If you like a small piece of theater to make the point, hand your Bible to a student and have him carry it across the room to another: that walk, stretched over a thousand Roman miles, is verse 7.

Then the first pair. *Tychicus* — three titles, stacked: *beloved brother* (family), *faithful minister* (the same *diakonos* Paul claimed for himself), *fellow servant* (a slave of Christ, like the

apostle). A native of Asia, named in Acts among Paul's companions, described in Ephesians in nearly identical words — the most trusted aide Paul had, the man sent on the errands that mattered. Then say the student book's sentence slowly, because it collapses two thousand years: the letter to the Colossians is in our hands today because Tychicus put it in the hands of the church at Colossae. Every Bible in your room passed through his satchel.

And with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. Let the room feel who just walked in. The runaway slave of Session Eight's hardest teaching — fled from his Christian master in this very town, met Paul in this very imprisonment, converted under this very ministry — now walking home. Not dragged back under coercion: sent, as *faithful and beloved brother*, and — read it twice — *one of you*. A Colossian. A Christian. A member of the body. The new identity has overrun the old. And the pairing itself is theology: the free Asian aide and the reconciled runaway travel the same road carrying the same letter, equally the apostolic mission. The new humanity of 3:11 — *Christ is all, and in all* — is already showing in the way Paul names his messengers. Tell the class to hold Onesimus in mind; he returns at the end of the hour with a letter of his own.

Aristarchus, Mark, Justus: Comfort and Reconciliation

Three Jewish believers, each with a sentence-portrait worth painting. *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner* — the Macedonian from Thessalonica who was seized by the Ephesus mob in Acts 19, survived the shipwreck off Malta on the voyage to Rome, and now shares the apostle's confinement, perhaps literally, perhaps by choice. Some friendships are measured in riots weathered.

Mark the cousin of Barnabas — and here is the name with the longest story, so give it its minute. John Mark began the first missionary journey and turned back partway; his departure split Paul and Barnabas so sharply that the two apostles parted company. And now — *welcome him if he comes to you*. The rift is healed; the man Paul once refused to travel with is the man Paul commends to the valley by name — and the same Mark will write the Gospel that bears his name. The student book's line is the takeaway: the gospel does its work over time. People once estranged are restored. Somebody in your room has a Mark, and this verse is twenty seconds of hope on the subject. *Jesus who is called Justus* — known to us only here, and the book's sentence about him is quietly lovely: beyond this verse, his story is hidden in God. Most faithful stories are.

Then the line over all three: *the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers... and they have been a comfort to me*. The Greek behind *comfort* is *parēgoria* — the root of *paregoric*, the soothing medicine. Paul, the Jew whose own people largely rejected the gospel he preached, found these three Jewish brothers to be medicine for his soul. Even apostles need company that understands a particular grief.

Epaphras: Wrestling in Prayer

Now the homecoming your study has been waiting for since its first hour. Epaphras — *who is one of you* — is the native son who heard Paul in Ephesus, carried the gospel home, and planted the church this whole letter is addressed to. Your class met him in Session One. Here is what he has been doing ever since: *always struggling on your behalf in his prayers*. The verb is *agōnizomenos* — the wrestler's word, the athlete's agony — and your sharper students will hear the echo on purpose: it is the same *agōn* root Paul used of his own toil in 1:29 and his struggle for Laodicea in 2:1. The arc completes. The apostle struggled; the founder learned the struggle; and the struggle is conducted on his knees, daily, by name — praying the Colossians *mature and fully assured*, the very things Paul prayed in 1:28 and 2:2. Epaphras has internalized the apostolic concern and made it his own.

A CLASSIC LUTHERAN MOVE

Pause on what Paul certifies here, because it corrects a mismeasurement your students make weekly without noticing. The Colossians could see only Epaphras's absence — their founder, gone for months, off in Rome. Paul, watching him in the prison, testifies to what the absence was spent on: *he has worked hard for you* — the Greek says much toil — for Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, the whole valley carried daily before the throne. Intercession is labor. The Lutheran tradition has prized exactly this: the pastor's chief work is hidden — done on his knees, before the means of grace, on behalf of people who will never see it — and Paul ratifies the estimate by giving Epaphras his own title, *servant of Christ Jesus*. No second-class minister; the same line as the apostle. Then make it local and let it land: your students' pastor does this. The names of your congregation are carried, by name, in prayers nobody attends and no report records. And then widen it once more, because the priesthood of the baptized owns this work too: every student who took home an index card last week has already enlisted in Epaphras's vocation. Wrestling is open to the whole body.

Luke and Demas: the One Who Stayed, the One Who Left

Two names in one verse, and the contrast is the lesson. *Luke the beloved physician* — the author of the Gospel and Acts, the *we* of the travel narratives, the doctor likely tending the prisoner's needs, and the companion of whom Paul will write from his final imprisonment: *Luke alone is with me*. When everyone else had gone, Luke remained. The man who wrote the Gospel of the gentle Savior was himself a gentle, immovable presence at the apostle's side.

As does Demas. Read it exactly as Paul wrote it, because the bareness is the data: no title, no warmth, no epithet — just the name. Then give the class the sequel, written years later:

Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. At the writing of Colossians the desertion is still future, and the student book is honest about the limits — perhaps the brevity already hints at something, perhaps we read too much in. Either way, the bare name now carries the freight of what came later, and Demas stands in the New Testament not as a model but as a warning: perseverance is required, and perseverance is not automatic. Then connect it to your own study, because the letter already said this with a face-less *if*: Session Three's warning — *if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast* — has just been given a face. Demas was once stable and steadfast. He did not remain so. And the Lutheran answer to the warning is the one your board has carried for ten weeks: the gospel is for the whole Christian life, not just its beginning — Word, water, bread, weekly, to the end. Demas is what happens when that is forgotten. Say it soberly, without speculation about anyone living, and move on.

Nympha, the Circulating Letters, Archippus

The circle widens to the valley. Greetings to Laodicea, and to *Nympha and the church in her house* — a woman whose vocation was to open her doors, providing the room, the table, and the hospitality inside which a congregation existed. The early Church met in homes, and the Lutheran honoring of vocation knows exactly what to call such work: holy.

Then the instruction that tells your class what kind of documents they have been studying: *when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans.* Apostolic letters were public — read aloud to the assembly, then sent on; not one congregation's private mail but the common possession of the believing network. Your class, you might observe, has spent ten weeks doing precisely what verse 16 commands. And the tantalizing half of the verse: *see that you also read the letter from Laodicea* — a letter Paul valued, which God's providence did not preserve. Give the alumni their delight: some scholars propose the lost Laodicean letter is the circular we know as Ephesians — in which case students of *In Christ* may have already read Laodicea's mail. But teach the student book's sturdier point: the Spirit who preserved what we have did not preserve what we do not have, and we do well to be content. The Word given to the Church is the Word the Church received and kept. The rest, we do not need.

Then the last personal word: *say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."* Philemon's letter calls him *our fellow soldier*; he was likely of that very household. The verb is *plêroō* — complete, bring to proper fullness — and the student book's cadence deserves quoting whole: the ministry is the Lord's gift; the minister is to fulfill it. Not partially. Not until it becomes inconvenient. To the end. Every baptized vocation in your room stands under the same word, and Question 5 will let them say so.

The Autograph: Remember My Chains

The heart of the final hour. Set the scene: Paul has been dictating, as he always did; now the pen changes hands. *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand* — the authenticating signature against the forgers, as in Galatians and the Corinthian and Thessalonian letters. The handwriting on the original changed at this line. The apostle's actual hand made its mark — a hand, your class should remember, attached by a chain to a Roman guard.

And in that own-hand line, three words the Church has carried for two thousand years: *Remember my chains*. Read them and let them sit. He has confessed the cosmic Christ in whom the fullness dwells bodily; he has unfolded baptism, the canceled *cheirographon*, the disarmed powers; he has freed the conscience, turned doctrine into life, furnished the household, salted the speech — and his last personal word is the cost. The gospel he confessed brought him to this cell, and he asks the comfortable churches of the Lycus valley not to forget it. Then the student book's sentence, which is the frame of your whole study closing — write it on the board beside the seed list: the same hand that traced the Christ-hymn traced the chains. The two belong together. The believer who walks away from Colossians as if it were a free gift with no attached cost has missed the apostolic signature — and the gospel is still preached, in this generation as in every one, by people bearing real loss for it.

And then the actual last words, and the relief in them: *Grace be with you*. *Charis* — the gift-word that opened the letter in 1:2 — closes it. The whole letter has been the unfolding of that one word: what the grace is, where it comes from, what it cancels, what it clothes, how it rules and dwells and sings. Even the chains do not contradict it; they are an instance of it. The letter ends where it began, in the word that defines everything else — and in nine minutes, so will your study.

Gathering the Whole Study

Before the discussion, take three minutes for the volume's own retrospective, board in hand — not a recap but a tour of what is already written there. The five verbs in the corner, untouched since the first hour: *qualified, delivered, transferred, redemption, forgiveness* — Session One. The hymn that grounded Formula of Concord VIII — Session Two. The mystery whose name titles the volume — Session Three. The font and the nail, the catechism and Apology IV — Session Four. The freed conscience — Session Five. The left column and the right — Sessions Six through Nine, with the left column exactly as God wrote it. Then the student book's verdict, which your class has now earned the right to hear: no captivity letter has done more theological work for the Lutheran tradition than this one — and the whole of it folds into the five words on the cover: *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. The whole gospel in five words. Then close the tour with the volume's refrain, one last time: He has always been enough. He will always be enough.



Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Choose one — and guard the final nine minutes with your life; the read-back is what they are for.

Question 1 — Your fellow workers in the gospel. The gratitude question, and the right register for a finale. Press for actual names: the Sunday school teacher of 1974, the grandmother with the worn Bible, the friend who kept inviting. Let this one run warm and specific — it is Colossians 4 happening in your classroom, and thanksgiving has been the letter's keynote since chapter 1.

Question 2 — Onesimus and the identities the world calls fixed. The Session Eight harvest. Keep Session Six's distinction in hand: identities are dethroned before God, not erased in the natural order — Onesimus goes home still Onesimus, but *brother* now has the longer reach than anything else true about him.

Question 3 — Who needs your wrestling. The Epaphras question, and it pairs beautifully with last week's index card — some students will realize the name on the card has just been assigned a posture. Intercession by name, daily, unseen: commend it as the most Colossian habit the study can leave behind.

Question 4 — Demas and the pull of the present world. The sober question; keep it strictly first-person — where do *you* feel the pull — and never let it become speculation about absent people's souls. The anchor against the pull is not vigilance but the means: the Demas road is paved with skipped Word and abandoned table.

Question 5 — The ministry you have received. Archippus's charge, distributed. Every station qualifies — the parent, the elder, the quilter, the treasurer — and the verb is the point: *fulfill* it, to completion, not until inconvenient. A fitting last vocation question for a study that has dignified every calling in the room.

Question 6 — Remembering the chains. The frame question. Let it reach the persecuted church of the present day — the believers for whom verse 18 is not historical — and let it produce gratitude without guilt: the right response to an apostle in chains is not embarrassment at our freedom but faithfulness with it.

A PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

If you pick only one question, consider Question 1 — the fellow workers. A study that began in thanksgiving (Session One walked the letter's opening thanks) should end in it, and naming the saints who carried the gospel to your students is the most fitting discussion a greetings chapter can host. Question 3 is the strong alternative, and it sends the index cards home with a second assignment. Either way, watch the clock: the hopes are waiting.

If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes

Occasionally you will have a session compressed by a church event, a lengthy announcement, or late arrivals. Here is what to keep and what to cut.

Keep

- ◆ Tychicus and Onesimus — the courier and the brother, with the Philemon bridge. The session's freight.
- ◆ Epaphras wrestling — the Session One homecoming and the hidden labor.
- ◆ The autograph, unhurried — chains and grace, the frame closed.
- ◆ The hopes read-back. Never cut this; it is the keystone of the entire study, and everything else in the hour exists to get you there.
- ◆ One discussion question, most likely Question 1, shortened if necessary.

Cut or Compress

- ◆ Aristarchus's biography. One sentence: riots, shipwreck, still here.
- ◆ The Mark backstory. Keep the reconciliation; drop the itinerary.
- ◆ Justus. He keeps his one sentence — hidden in God.
- ◆ The Laodicean-letter question. One sentence: not preserved; we are content.
- ◆ Nympha and the circulation instruction. Compress to the open doors and the public reading.

THE SINGLE NON-NEGOTIABLE

If the session were reduced to one thing, that thing would be the closing ceremony done whole: the Session One hopes read aloud over the finished board, and the letter's own last six words spoken over the class — *Remember my chains. Grace be with you.* A study that ends this way has ended the way the letter ends, with the cost remembered and the gift having the final word. Everything else in the hour can flex. This cannot.



The Hopes Read Back

This is the closing nine minutes, and it deserves its own instructions rather than a line in the time plan.

THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING MOVE

Take out the Session One notes. Tell the class what you are holding — their own hopes, recorded in the first hour, before the hymn, before the font, before the wardrobe and the table and the salt. Then read them aloud, slowly, one at a time, without commentary — every voice from that first morning, including any from students no longer attending, read with care. Let silence sit between them. When the list is finished, ask the room one question and then get out of the way: what has this letter done with these? Some hopes were answered directly; some were answered differently than asked; some were quietly replaced by better ones nobody knew to want in week one. As they answer, stand where you can gesture at the board — the five verbs, the flowered seeds, the left column — because the deepest answer to every hope on that paper has been sitting there in God's handwriting since Session One: qualified, delivered, transferred, redeemed, forgiven. Then mark the fifth seed — the faithful labor of handing the gospel on — fully flowered: it bloomed this very hour, in Tychicus's satchel, Epaphras's knees, Nympha's doorway, and the index cards in their wallets. Ten weeks ago they hoped. The letter answered. Let them hear both halves in the same five minutes, and the study will close itself.

Then pray the student book's closing prayer — the great thanksgiving over the whole letter — and if hymnals are out, one stanza. The fourth stanza of "A Mighty Fortress" was written for people who remember chains.



For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- ◆ Philemon. The twenty-five verses that traveled in the same satchel — Onesimus's own letter, the household table's living case study, and the doorway to the series' final volume. The essential next reading.
- ◆ 2 Timothy 4:9–18. The roll call years later: Demas gone, Luke alone faithful, Mark *very useful to me for ministry* — the sequels of this chapter's names, with one warning and two vindications.
- ◆ Romans 16:1–16. The other great name-chapter of the New Testament — Phoebe, Prisca and Aquila, the beloved and the unknown — proof that Colossians 4 is no anomaly: the apostolic gospel always traveled by named, particular people.
- ◆ Acts 19:8–10. The hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus, where Paul reasoned daily for two years — *so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord*. The room where Epaphras first heard what he carried home; your study's whole backstory in three verses.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- ◆ Augsburg Confession, Preface and Conclusion. Laymen — princes and city councils — confessing the faith before the emperor in 1530, prepared to bear the cost. *Remember my chains*, in sixteenth-century dress.
- ◆ “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” stanza four. *And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife... the Kingdom ours remaineth* — the chains theology of verse 18, in the chorale your class already knows by heart. Sing it today.
- ◆ The Small Catechism, whole. Read it cover to cover this month with Colossians-trained eyes; your students will be startled how much of this letter they find in it — the font, the table, the duties, the prayers. Ten weeks of study, riding in a pocket.
- ◆ “For All the Saints” (LSB 677). The Church's own way of doing what Colossians 4 does — naming, remembering, and giving thanks for those who carried the faith to us, *who Thee by faith before the world confessed*.

Commentaries

- ◆ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary, CPH). Warm on the greetings and careful to the last verse — the right companion for a teacher who wants to keep walking this letter after the study ends.

- ◆ R. C. H. Lenski, *Colossians*. Lenski's volume covers Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon together — meaning the next letter is already on the shelf.
- ◆ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar, Eerdmans). The Philemon commentary bound into the same volume is your head start on the series' final study.

A Final Word

Ten weeks ago you opened a letter written from a prison cell to a church its author had never seen, and you have now taught the whole of it — the hymn and the font, the nail and the freedom, the turn and the wardrobe, the table and the salt, and today the names and the chains. Look once more at your board before you erase it: the five verbs never moved, the left column never changed, and every hope your class spoke in the first hour was answered out of that corner. That is not a teaching technique. That is the gospel's own architecture, and you spent ten weeks letting a class watch it stand.

And the study ends, fittingly, mid-journey. Tychicus and Onesimus are still on the road as the letter closes — and the smaller letter in the same satchel is where this series goes next. *Brother in Christ*, the fourth and final volume of The Pauline Captivity Letters, takes up Philemon: twenty-five verses, one household, one runaway returning, and the gospel doing its slow, irresistible work on a single relationship — *no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother*. Ephesians gave the series God's purpose in Christ; Philippians, the surpassing worth of knowing him; Colossians, the fullness of Christ and *Christ in you, the hope of glory*; Philemon will close it with the gospel walking through one front door in the Lycus valley. Your class has already met everyone in the story. Commend the journey's last leg to them warmly, and take it with them if you can.

Thank you for teaching this study. The labor was mostly hidden — the preparation nobody saw, the prayers nobody heard, the names carried Epaphras-style week after week — which is to say, it was the real kind. The Lord who is all and in all has been at work through it, and the day of appearing will show what the classroom could not.

Remember the apostle's chains. He has always been enough. He will always be enough.

Grace be with you.

Soli Deo Gloria