

# You Are Alive in Christ



STONECROFT



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## **YOU ARE ALIVE IN CHRIST**

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# Welcome to Stonecroft Bible Studies!

**I**t doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done... God wants to be in relationship with you. And one place He tells you about Himself is in His Word—the Bible. Whether the Bible is familiar or new to you, its contents will transform your life and bring answers to your biggest questions.

Gather with people in your communities—women, men, couples, young and old alike—and explore the completeness of the salvation that God has given us in Jesus Christ, His Son. Come to a deeper understanding of what it means to be *in Christ* and share His life, and how nothing needs to be added to our day-to-day faith: not rules or customs, not human ideas or philosophies, not religious rituals—we find completeness only in Him.

Each chapter of *You Are Alive in Christ* includes discussion questions to stir up meaningful conversation, specific Scripture verses to investigate, and time for prayer to connect with God and each other.

Discover more of God and His ways through this small-group exploration of the Bible.

## **Tips for Using This Study**

This book includes several features that make it easy to use and helpful for your life:

- The page number or numbers given after every Bible reference are keyed to the page numbers in the *Abundant Life Bible*. This paperback Bible uses the New Living Translation, a translation in straightforward, up-to-date language. We encourage you to obtain a copy through your group leader or at [stonecroft.org](http://stonecroft.org).
- Each chapter ends with a section called “Thoughts, Notes, and Prayer Requests.” Use this space for notes or for thoughts that come to you during your group time or study, as well as prayer requests.
- In the back of the book you will find “Journal Pages”—a space available for writing down how the study is changing your life or any other personal thoughts, reactions, and reflections.
- Please make this book and study your own. We encourage you to use it and mark it in any way that helps you grow in your relationship with God!

If you find this study helpful, you may want to investigate other resources from Stonecroft. Please take a look at “Stonecroft Resources” in the back of the book or online at [stonecroft.org/store](http://stonecroft.org/store).

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# A Letter to Colosse

Colossians 1:1-14

**W**e'd been flying for hours over nothing but water, when the pilot's voice came over the intercom telling us to prepare for landing. My cousin and I looked out the window, eager to catch a glimpse of our new home, but all we could see was water. There was no land in sight. "We'll buzz the runway once to clear it of pigs and people," the pilot continued, and simultaneously the plane banked sharply to the left. Our mouths gaped in shock at the sight below us. We were staring at a mere shoestring of land lost in the vast Pacific Ocean. The atoll of Majuro, our new home, was only 30 miles long and a half mile wide—at its widest! Most of the atoll was much narrower. In fact, part of it disappeared underwater during high tide!

We'd come here as volunteer missionaries eager to find adventure, and we were not disappointed. As we exited the plane we exited life as we knew it. This primitive little island, one of hundreds that make up the nation of Micronesia, lacked the most basic of amenities we took for granted at home. The culture and living conditions were even more foreign to us than the blistering equatorial heat and humidity. That first night we hunkered down in our sparse quarters, surrounded by giant spiders, cockroaches, geckos, and mosquitoes, and we prayed for our adventure to end.

With dawn came a renewed anticipation for our adventure. In no time at all we had fallen in love with life in Micronesia. Our days were long and our responsibilities endless and challenging, but we experienced God at a deeper level than ever before. By the time we returned home we'd been forever changed.

In this study of Colossians we'll be traveling to a country different than our own and meeting people who lived under far more challenging circumstances. You are in for an adventure as we get acquainted with them and see God from their perspective. And be prepared. Like my cousin and me—you may never be the same again!

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### *Prayer*

God, you gave us the Scriptures long ago to teach us, to give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for your promises to be fulfilled. I know that all Scripture is inspired by you and teaches us what is true, and it makes us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. Use your Word in this study to prepare me and equip me to do every good work, for I know your Word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path (Romans 15:4, page 868; 2 Timothy 3:16-17, page 915; and Psalm 119:105, page 470).

### **The Situation in Colosse**

Ladies and gentlemen, prepare for landing! We are approaching the biblical town of Colosse, which is located in what is now the country of Turkey. The time is approximately AD 62, and although Colosse was once a larger city, it has now become smaller. Near Colosse are two larger and more prosperous cities: Laodicea and Hierapolis.

The first person we'll meet is a man named Epaphras. He had



committed his life to following Jesus and had founded a church in Colosse made up of others who shared his commitment. He grew concerned, however, because some of the people had begun dabbling in popular human philosophies or belief systems prevalent in their culture, such as mysticism, angel worship, humanism, asceticism, and legalism. They confused the simple message of the Gospel—that Jesus died for their sins—by adding in the legalism of Jewish laws, along with some pagan customs and festivals, and incorporating into this eclectic mix their own human reasoning.

All of this was counter to the teachings of Jesus and kept them from growing in their faith. It limited their ability to access all the advantages that come from a personal relationship with God. Saddest of all, it prevented them from grasping the reality of God's grace and their freedom in Christ.

Epaphras became concerned enough that he decided to seek advice from one of the top Christian leaders of the day—the apostle Paul. This meant he had to travel all the way to Rome (a difficult journey of about a thousand miles), where Paul had been imprisoned for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Epaphras and Paul discussed the problems facing the Colossians, after which Paul wrote a letter warning them of the dangers of getting involved with any kind of false teaching. The letter he wrote is what we, today, know as the New Testament book of Colossians.

As we study this letter together, I think you'll be amazed to discover just how familiar it sounds. The same philosophies that led the Colossians astray still exist today with a few different twists. And just like the Colossians, many of today's Christians are still trying to add in bits and pieces of these human philosophies to the truth of the Bible. In this verse-by-verse study of the letter to the Colossians, we will see how Paul helped them realize the danger in what they were doing and taught them how to affirm and access all the benefits of their relationship with God. In the process, we will learn how to access these same benefits for ourselves.

## God Chooses Paul

Let's begin by reading Paul's greeting to the Colossians in 1:1-2 (page 902).

Paul begins by making a statement about himself—he has been chosen by God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. Let's gain a little more information about Paul.

According to the following verses, how would you describe him?

Philippians 3:5 (page 900)

Acts 22:3 (page 851)

Tarsus was an ancient city of the Roman province of Cilicia, located in south central Turkey ten miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. Tarsus was known for its wealth and strong education system, in which it is said to have rivaled Athens and Alexandria. Both the law of the Romans and the language and wisdom of the Greeks impacted its inhabitants.

Paul—at that time, still named Saul—was a highly educated man, having studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, a great Jewish teacher and member of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court. Saul, deeply devoted to the Jewish religion, grew very concerned about the new and growing sect of people called Christians. Believing he

was doing God's will, he persecuted them, determined to destroy Christianity once and for all. Read Acts 26:9-11 (page 854).

By his own testimony later, Saul violently opposed Christians until the day he had an encounter that radically transformed his life. Read Acts 26:12-18 (page 854).

Do you find it astounding that God chose a passionate enemy of Christianity to spread its message further afield?

Why do you think God chose a devout Jew to take this radical message to Gentiles?

It's one of the things I love most about God. He does what sometimes seems illogical from our human perspective to accomplish what is most needed. Take a moment to think of a time in your life when He used something that seemed illogical to bring about something great.

How did God's working in you affect your relationship with Him?

Saul's dramatic conversion to Christianity caused a complete one-eighty in his life. He became as passionate about following Jesus as he had been opposed to Him. He lived a life of adventure as he organized and encouraged young congregations of believers throughout Asia Minor and Europe.

Just as astonishing as Saul's conversion, however, is the fact that the Christians of that time trusted it! Think about it. Before his conversion Saul had terrorized and brutalized them, and now he's claiming to have become a believer just like they were.

If you'd lived back then, how hard would it have been for you to believe Saul's story?

Read Acts 9:13-14 (page 838) to see one man's reaction.

Ananias wasn't exactly thrilled when God asked him to go visit Saul, was he? And can you blame him? Nonetheless, Ananias did as God instructed, and Saul's amazing journey as a follower of Jesus began.

If you had lived back then, what proof of conversion would you have needed to believe Paul had truly become a Christian?

Read Galatians 1:15–2:10 (pages 890-891).

How did Paul gain approval from the first-century Christians?

Paul knew he needed the support and approval of the other apostles to most effectively share and spread the Gospel, so he went to the church in Jerusalem where Peter, James, and John were influential leaders at that time.

The believers trusted Paul and rallied behind him, and he became the most influential voice of Christianity in that time. He also became a prolific writer, authoring 13 books of the New Testament, which were actually letters he wrote to congregations and friends to train and encourage them in their faith.

If you ever have doubt that God can forgive anything, remember Paul. He went from hating Jesus to passionately loving Him. He became a dedicated, devoted Christian whose worldwide impact continues more than 2000 years later. There is no person too evil, no sin too great for God to forgive. He delights in redeeming lives!

In the first verse of Colossians, Paul calls himself an apostle. Apostles were chosen by God and spoke with God-given power and authority.

What is one characteristic of an apostle, according to Galatians 1:1 (page 890)?

God appointed the apostles. People did not. Remember from Galatians 1:15-16 that God chose and called Paul by His grace to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

## Christian Mentorship

Paul also mentioned a man named Timothy in Colossians 1:1. Read Acts 16:1-3 (pages 844-845) and 1 Corinthians 4:17 (page 872).

What characteristics describe Timothy in these passages?

Paul's love for Timothy is evident. Paul became his mentor, working closely with him, training him to live fully for Jesus.

Have you had someone mentor you? How did it benefit you?

Have you been a mentor to someone? What did you learn from that experience?

Timothy became a tremendous source of help and encouragement for Paul—just as Paul was for Timothy. That’s one of the benefits of a mentoring relationship. Both parties benefit from the relationship. Ask God if there is someone He would like you to mentor. Jot down the name that comes to mind and pray for that person. Ask God to help you find an opportunity to make yourself available to that person.

### **Greeting and Gratitude**

Right from the beginning, the tone of Paul’s letter is warm and respectful.

How does he describe the Colossians in verse 2?

What does he ask God to give them?

This is not just a generic greeting Paul tossed their way. It got right to the heart of the matter he addressed later. Dabbling in false philosophies produces a diminished awareness of the grace of God and a distinct lack of peace. Paul immediately set to work helping them regain the ground they had lost.

Read Colossians 1:3-8 (page 902).

Do you hear the positive tone of Paul's writing? His joy and passion for serving God and his love for the Colossians are evidenced in every line.

Even though Paul was writing to correct the Colossians, there is no criticism in his words. Instead, what is the first thing he tells them in verse 3?

How does it make you feel when you know someone is praying for you?

One of the greatest gifts we can give someone is sincere prayer on their behalf. Such prayers as God leads can impact a life. For the Colossians to know that Paul—one of the key Christian leaders of the day—was praying for them would have been deeply encouraging.

What are the two reasons Paul gives in verse 4 for being thankful to God?

1.



2.

This gives us a good picture of the Colossians. They have put their faith in Christ, and their faith is evidenced by their *“love for all of God’s people.”* This is exactly what is supposed to happen as a result of committing our lives to Jesus. Our response to others should be love. Paul recognized this attitude in the Colossians, and we recognize it in him in the way he writes to them.

The more you read Paul’s writing, the more you become aware of his immense spirit of gratitude. This gratitude has nothing to do with his external circumstances for he gave up everything to follow Jesus, and he suffered mightily as a result of it. His gratitude and joy were results of his internal condition—his relationship with God that transcended even the worst circumstance. Paul wanted the Colossians to experience the same spirit of gratitude and joy.

According to verse 6, how can we know that the Good News bears fruit all over the world?

God’s wisdom is clearly guiding Paul’s writing. Paul knew the Colossians’ vulnerability to other philosophies that were popular in that culture. He understood the temptation to try to accommodate these philosophies; the Colossians didn’t want to appear to the rest of society to be different or close-minded. Rather than condemn

them, Paul told them how the Good News changed lives as it spread around the world—just as it changed their lives.

How would this affect you if you were one of the Colossians? Would it cause you to back up and re-evaluate the concessions you had started to make?

It encourages us to be a part of something alive and growing. When you feel like you're small in number and alone you can start looking around for something bigger to be a part of. We don't know if this is what caused the Colossians to begin paying more attention to other philosophies. Maybe it was pressure they felt from their culture. Maybe some of them brought beliefs or practices into their lives from before they became Christ-followers. Whatever the reason behind their compromised passion for the truth, Paul let them know they were a part of something alive and vibrant and growing.

### **A Marvelous Prayer**

Read Colossians 1:9-12 (page 902) and record everything Paul prayed for on their behalf.

What an incredible prayer to pray for someone! Is there someone for whom you could pray these verses? Take a few minutes and do that.

Now look at the list you made. If you had to categorize your list, how would you describe it?

Paul does not ask for their physical protection. He does not ask that they will be able to pay their bills or even for healing of any in their group who are ill. No! He prays for their spiritual wisdom and growth, for fruitful lives that please the Lord, for strength and patience. He prays they will be filled with joy and a spirit of continual gratitude.

In what ways could you apply this practice in your own prayer life?

Read the last sentence of Colossians 1:12 along with verses 13 and 14 (page 902). In just a handful of words Paul reminds them of the

incomprehensible gift that is theirs as children of God. Look at the words he uses: *rescued, transferred, purchased freedom, forgave!*

What did the Colossians do to earn this gift?

How does Ephesians 2:8-9 (page 896) describe this gift?

In God's immense love for us, He sent His only Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. Jesus' death and resurrection make it possible for us to have a personal relationship with God the Father. When we turn away from our sin and turn to Christ who died to save us from our sins, we become a child of God with full access to all of His promises for this life on earth plus the promise of eternal life with Him in heaven after our physical death.

If you do not have a personal relationship with God and would like to know more about this, turn to "Know God" on pages 117–119. What a great way to start this study! It will change your life in ways you never dreamed possible.

This brings us to the end of our first chapter. I suggest reading all four chapters of Colossians this week so you can obtain an idea of what we'll be studying. As you read, if any questions come to mind, jot them down and we will discuss them as we get to that point in the study.

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*Personal Reflection and Application*

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From this chapter,

*I see...*

*I believe...*

*I will...*

---

*Prayer*

Lord, don't let me ever be impressed with my own wisdom. Instead, help me fear you and turn away from evil. I know that intelligent people are always ready to learn and their ears are open for knowledge, so help me to pay attention and learn good judgment, for I know you give me good guidance. Don't let me turn away from your instructions (Proverbs 3:7, page 482; Proverbs 18:15, page 493; and Proverbs 4:1-2, page 483).

Thoughts, Notes, and Prayer Requests

Lined writing area consisting of multiple horizontal lines.