

LET MEN THEIR
Songs
EMPLOY

ADVENT READING PLAN 2023

ABOUT THIS READING PLAN

Each week's questions will take you on a journey to study one passage of the book of Colossians over the course of five days. These questions are designed to equip you with good Inductive Bible study methods, learning to **observe** the passage through the lens of the original audience, **interpret** the passage through the lens of Christ's full plan of redemption, and **apply** the passage through the lens of a 21st Century follower of Jesus.

Here are some key skills you will develop:

1. **Observation Skills** - You will practice isolating the different parts of a passage and see how they relate to one another using basic grammar skills.
2. **Interpretation Skills** - You will learn how to use the features you observed to discover the author's intent. You will also learn how to use the whole context of the book and cross-references in the Bible to check and deepen meaning and understanding.
3. **Application Skills** - You will be challenged to create faithful and specific applications that are in line with the author's original intent for writing.

We urge you to make the most of this study, devoting yourself to daily reading and prayerful study. Each time you sit down with God's word, you can follow this pattern:

Pray - Ask God to give you understanding and to transform you through his word.

Read - Read slowly and carefully. Use the daily study questions to continually add to your understanding.

Pray - Ask God to impress what you have read upon your heart. Pray for the opportunity to share it with someone else, and pray for others in our church as they seek to walk in this truth with you.

Share - Talk to someone else about what God is revealing to you through his word. This might be another member of your Gospel Community, a mentor, a disciple, or even an unbeliever.

Find free online tools like Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias and Greek lexicons on biblestudytools.com.

INTRODUCTION

Series Vision: That we would learn to use God's gift of singing to fill our hearts with the truth and beauty of his gospel.

Every year radio stations and department stores repeat the same playlist of Christmas classics that many of us know and love. Intermixed with the endless repetition of Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You," the truths of the gospel ring out in song over busy holiday shoppers and travelers alike. It's easy to hit repeat on our Christmas hits playlist and or get excited when the worship team starts into our favorite Christmas carol in church, but how often do we allow the truth of these lyrics to penetrate our hearts?

In his classic hymn, "Joy to the World," Isaac Watts instructs us toward something better through the simple lyric, "Let men their songs employ." Watts is saying, "Put your singing to work, because God has designed singing as the proper response to our Savior." This is a skill that is needed in this season and every season because God desires a singing people (see Col. 3:16). As we study the scripture passages that inspired some of the best Christmas hymns, we hope to take these beautiful expressions of truth beyond the nostalgia, learning to use them to fill our hearts with hope, peace, joy, love, and ultimately, Christ.

EXAMPLE STUDY

1 TIMOTHY 3:14-16

DAY 1: OBSERVATION - STRUCTURE

1. Mark where the translators changed paragraphs with a ¶ symbol.
2. Number each paragraph: "1,2, etc."
3. Put a | line between each sentence and label "a,b,c, etc." and start over when you get to a new paragraph in this translation.
4. Underline the main action word of each sentence.
5. Put a square around who or what is doing that action (or supposed to do the action - if it is an implied "you," write that in).
6. Circle any conjunctions (connecting words like, and, but, because, therefore, for, so that). Notice how these conjunctions connect the main thoughts in the passage.

14 ¶1a I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. |b 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

¶2a. He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

"I" = Paul
"you" = Timothy
"we" = Either Paul/Timothy
or the whole church
"He" = Jesus Christ

a. Summarize each sentence in as few words as possible.

1a - Paul is writing so that Timothy would know how each one ought to behave in the church

1b - The mystery of godliness is great

2b - The cosmic work of Jesus is the great mystery of godliness.

b. Summarize each paragraph in as few words as possible.

1 - Timothy must ensure that each member of Christ's family knows how they must behave for the sake of the confession that produces that behavior.

2 - The cosmic work of Jesus is the way the church can behave as she ought.

c. Summarize the whole passage in as few words as possible.

Timothy, it is essential that you know how each person must behave in the church to protect and preserve the gospel truth that transforms us.

DAY 2: OBSERVATION - CONTEXT

How does this passage relate to the paragraph before and after? Are there any themes or images in this passage that show up elsewhere in this book? How does this serve the author's overall argument (what would we lose if this passage wasn't here)?

BEFORE: Paul just finished writing about the qualifications for elders and deacons. A number of the qualifications include the "household life" of the leaders.

AFTER: Paul contrasts those who depart from "the faith" and those who "believe and know the truth."

THEMES - Later in chapter 4 and even more in chapter 5, Paul advocates for relationships in the church that look like family relationships (especially brother/sister language)

DAY 3: INTERPRETATION - GOSPEL CONNECTION

What specific part of the gospel (the person and work of Jesus Christ) is referenced? How does the author use this part of the gospel?

The confession references many aspects of the work of Christ that creates the "mystery of godliness" -

MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH = Incarnation

VINDICATED BY THE SPIRIT = Righteous Life, Death, Resurrection in the power of the Spirit

SEEN BY ANGELS = Witness of the Heavenly Beings of the Church

PROCLAIMED AMONG THE NATIONS/ BELIEVED ON IN THE WORLD = Advancement of the Gospel Through the Church

TAKEN UP IN GLORY = Current Reign

DAY 4: INTERPRETATION - BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

How does this passage relate to God's plan in Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Future Restoration (the whole storyline of the Bible)?

GODLINESS -

CREATION - The Lord created man and woman "in his own image-likeness" (i.e. to be godly) They were to be his family.

FALL - Man and woman depart from the truth and fail to behave in any reflection of godliness.

REDEMPTION - Jesus came to redeem a people for himself who would be restored to reflect his godliness

FUTURE RESTORATION - One day the church will be fully godly as Christ is - the "hymn" in this writing will have an ultimate fulfillment.

DAY 5: APPLICATION - MAIN POINT / ACTIONABLE RESPONSE

What is the author's main message to his primary audience? What does this mean for our church and your life? How will you apply this personally?

AUTHOR'S MESSAGE - Timothy, make sure the church knows how they are supposed to relate as a family so that the powerful, transforming truth of the gospel can be seen for what it truly is.

IMPLICATION - I must know how to relate to others in the church, and do so in the power of the gospel.

APPLICATION - This week, I will text the other members of my G.C. reminding of these gospel truths and telling them how important they are to me as my brothers and sisters in Christ.

WEEK 1

LUKE 2:22-38

"O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel... O Come, Desire of Nations, Bind in one the hearts of all mankind."
-O Come, O Come Emmanuel, J.M. Neale

DAY 1: OBSERVATION - STRUCTURE

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5. Put a square around who or what is doing that action (or supposed to do the action - if it is an implied "you," write that in).
6. Circle any conjunctions (connecting words like, and, but, because, therefore, for, so that).
Notice how these conjunctions connect the main thoughts in the passage.

22 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;

30 for my eyes have seen your salvation

31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel."

33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, 37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

- a. Summarize each sentence in as few words as possible.

- b. Summarize each paragraph in as few words as possible.

- c. Summarize the whole passage in as few words as possible.

DAY 2: OBSERVATION - *CONTEXT*

How does this passage relate to the paragraph before and after? Are there any themes or images in this passage that show up elsewhere in this book? How does this serve the author's overall argument (what would we lose if this passage wasn't here)?

DAY 3: INTERPRETATION - *GOSPEL CONNECTION*

What specific part of the gospel (the person and work of Jesus Christ) is referenced? How does the author use this part of the gospel?

DAY 4: INTERPRETATION - *BIBLICAL THEOLOGY*

How does this passage relate to God's plan in Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Future Restoration (the whole storyline of the Bible)?

DAY 5: APPLICATION - *MAIN POINT / ACTIONABLE RESPONSE*

What is the author's main message to his primary audience? What does this mean for our church and your life? How will you apply this personally?

WEEK 2

PSALM 85

"The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, With peace on earth, good will to men."
-Christmas Bells, H.W. Longfellow

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Notice how these conjunctions connect the main thoughts in the passage.

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.

85 LORD, you were favorable to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

2 You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you covered all their sin. *Selah*

3 You withdrew all your wrath;
you turned from your hot anger.

4 Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
and put away your indignation toward us!

5 Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?

6 Will you not revive us again,
that your people may rejoice in you?

7 Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,
and grant us your salvation.

8 Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints;
but let them not turn back to folly.

9 Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,
that glory may dwell in our land.

10 Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

11 Faithfulness springs up from the ground,
and righteousness looks down from the sky.

12 Yes, the LORD will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness will go before him
and make his footsteps a way.

- a. Summarize each sentence in as few words as possible.

- b. Summarize each paragraph in as few words as possible.

- c. Summarize the whole passage in as few words as possible.

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DAY 5: APPLICATION - *MAIN POINT / ACTIONABLE RESPONSE*

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WEEK 3

PSALM 98

"Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let men their songs employ, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy." -Joy to the World, Isaac Watts

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A Psalm.

98 Oh sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things!
His right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.

2 The LORD has made known his salvation;
he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

3 He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

4 Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

5 Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody!

6 With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!

7 Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who dwell in it!

8 Let the rivers clap their hands;
let the hills sing for joy together

9 before the LORD, for he comes
to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

- a. Summarize each sentence in as few words as possible.

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WEEK 4

LUKE 2:1-22

"How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is giv'n! So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heav'n."
-O Little Town of Bethlehem, Philip Brooks

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In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

21 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

22 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

- a. Summarize each sentence in as few words as possible.

- b. Summarize each paragraph in as few words as possible.

- c. Summarize the whole passage in as few words as possible.

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CHRISTMAS EVE

JOHN 1:1-3, 14 / JOHN 17:1-5

"Good Christian, fear: for sinners here the silent Word is pleading."
-What Child Is This, W.C. Dix

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1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

17 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

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