

PRACTICAL INSIGHTS  
FOR EVERYDAY CHRISTIAN LIVING

# COLOSSIANS

A Biblical Study

JOYCE MEYER

Colossians 1:23

1963

by the knowledge of God [with fuller, deeper, and clearer insight, acquaintance, and recognition].

11 [We pray] that you may be invigorated and strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory [to exercise] every kind of endurance and patience [perseverance and forbearance] with joy.

## life point

Paul prayed that the Colossians would endure "with joy" (Colossians 1:11). Why with joy? Joy enables us to enjoy our journey in life whether we are in adverse circumstances or not. Joy is also our strength and a weapon of spiritual warfare. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. We will never experience the joy Jesus intended for us to have if we wait until every circumstance is perfect in our lives. No matter what we endure, we can pray for one another to experience God's encouragement to pray for and live

14 In Whom we have our redemption through His blood, [which means] the forgiveness of our sins.

15 [Now] He is the 'exact likeness' of the unseen God [the visible representation of the invisible]. He is the Firstborn of all creation.

16 For it was in Him that all things were created, in heaven and on earth, things seen and things unseen, whether thrones, dominions, rulers, or authorities; all things were created and exist through Him [by His service, intervention] and in and for Him.

17 And He Himself existed before all things, and in Him all things consist (cohere, are held together). [Prov. 8:22-31.]

18 He also is the Head of [His] body, the church, seeing He is the Beginning, the Firstborn in everything dead, so that He alone in everything and in every respect might occupy the chief place [stand first and be preeminent].

19 For it has pleased [the Father] that all the divine fullness (the sum total of the divine perfection, powers, and attributes) should dwell in Him permanently.

purpose that through intervention of

# COLOSSIANS

*A Biblical Study*

**JOYCE MEYER**



  
*Faith  
Words*

NEW YORK NASHVILLE

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FaithWords  
Hachette Book Group  
1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104

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First published in hardcover and ebook in March 2020

First Trade Paperback Edition: March 2021

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN: 978-1-5460-2612-9 (trade paperback), 978-1-5460-2613-6 (ebook)

Printed in the United States of America

LSC-C

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK



I suggest that you take your time studying this book. Don't just skim over the book so you can finish it quickly. Take your time, not only reading but also pondering what you read. Stop at places that are important to you; think about how they apply to you personally and whether or not you need to make changes in your life in order to comply with God's will.

Answer the questions you will find at different places in the book because they will help you recognize areas in which you need to grow.

I also suggest that you take the time to look up the Scripture references throughout the book. Space did not permit us to print out each one, but you can open your Bible to the references mentioned and read the Scripture passages for yourself. The effort you put into doing this will enhance your overall experience with the book. Another option is to read the book in its entirety and then reread it in the manner I have suggested.

Remember that studying is different than simply reading. When we read, we take in information, but when we study, the information becomes revelation to us—it becomes part of us and affects our lives and behavior in deeper ways than a quick reading does.

## ABOUT COLOSSIANS



**Author:** *Paul*

**Date:** *Around AD 61*

**Audience:** *Christians in the city of Colossae*

When I first began thinking about this Biblical Study series, I wondered, “Are these books resources that people will really be interested in?” I concluded that they could help people greatly because the Bible—especially the New Testament and certain Old Testament books—is full of practical answers for everyday living.

The Bible is more than a book about theology or a story about eternal life when we die. It also offers us the wisdom we need to live victorious, peace-filled, joyful lives on earth. Jesus says in John 10:10, “The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have *and* enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]” (AMP). This verse is not only talking about enjoying life when we go on vacation or when something delightful happens. John 10:10 is talking about the fact that God offers us

the ability to relish ordinary, everyday life. If the only time we can enjoy ourselves is when something exciting happens, we will miss out on the joyful, abundant life Jesus died to give us. But if we learn to live according to God's Word, which requires study and obedience, we can savor each day.

Any time we familiarize ourselves with the Scriptures, it is good for us. But we need to do more than simply read God's Word; we need to study it deeply. We may read only one verse or passage for several days, but if we are really examining it and digging deep to understand what it means in our lives, that's when it will begin to transform us. The Bible teaches and empowers us in amazing ways, and we can only discover them when we diligently study it.

Most of the New Testament letters, called the Epistles, were written to young churches and believers who needed to grow in their faith and learn to live God's way. The writers—including the apostles Paul, James, Peter, and John—were trying to help new believers become established in their relationship with God and learn how to live godly lives. That's why they contain not only valuable theological principles but also important advice for our practical, everyday lives. I am excited to know that I will one day go to heaven, but I also want to enjoy the life I have today and every day before I go there.

One reason Paul's epistle to the Colossians is so important for us to study and understand is that it is *all about Jesus*. From start to finish, this letter exalts Jesus and affirms His lordship. The theme of the epistle is the headship of Christ,

and the primary lesson of these four chapters is to put Jesus first all the time, above and before everything else. We are to put Him first in our time, finances, thoughts, conversations, decisions, and relationships. If we keep Him first, we will never have to strive for or chase after anything. The blessings of God will chase us and overtake us (Deut. 28:2).

In Matthew 6:31, Jesus spoke about people who do not keep Him first and the fact that they worry about their lives, saying, “‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’”

He went on to say that people who do not know God “run after all these things,” but that “your heavenly Father knows that you need them” (Matt. 6:32).

Then He said: “But seek *first* his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33, emphasis mine). When we keep Jesus first and seek His kingdom above all else, we can live in love, peace, joy, power, and blessing.

Paul’s letter to the Colossians focuses so intensely on Jesus and encourages us to keep Him in first place in our lives because Paul knew that the believers in Colossae had been exposed to a false spiritual teaching that said Jesus was not really God. This popular belief system of the day, called Gnosticism, questioned Jesus’ lordship, sufficiency, and supremacy. At the time Paul wrote Colossians, Christianity would have been in jeopardy of being completely overwhelmed by false religions had God’s grace not protected it. He understood the extreme danger this heresy presented

to the Christians in Colossae and responded to it strongly with this epistle, emphasizing the importance of exalting Jesus over everything else. Out of his love and care for them, he confronted the heresy in this letter so they would realize how harmful it was to their faith and would be able to stand against it.

Gnosticism is a strange mixture of all kinds of different so-called religions, including Jewish legalism, Greek philosophy, and Eastern mysticism, all interwoven in a most cunning and deceptive way. 2 Thessalonians 2:7 refers to this as “the mystery of lawlessness” (AMP). Gnosticism teaches that human beings cannot know God. I cannot imagine anything sadder than for a person to be committed to a religion, diligently practicing it day after day, week after week—and to know they will never have a personal connection with the god they worship. As Christians, we believe that Jesus did not die for people to subscribe to a religion but for us to have a personal, intimate relationship with God.

While Gnostics say human beings cannot know God, Christians believe knowing God is the central theme and goal of life. Gnosticism is filled with human reasoning and is therefore attractive to the human mind. But it is satanic in origin. Some scholars even believe what was going on in the church of Colossae was the root of what is called Christian Science today. The purpose of Paul’s letter to the early Christians in Colossae was to urge them to beware of such deception and hold fast to Jesus as Lord.

Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians while he was in prison in Rome around the same time he wrote to the Ephesians and the Philippians. He had never been to Colossae or met the believers there. Most likely, a man named Epaphras, who was probably the leader of the church at Colossae and had converted to Christianity under Paul's ministry, asked Paul for his help. Though Paul did not know the people in the church personally, he cared about them and wanted to help them combat Gnosticism and strengthen them in their faith.

His letter to the Colossians defends, explains, and promotes the lordship of Jesus Christ more than any other book of the New Testament. One reason Colossians matters so much right now is that we are living in a day when we are not encouraged to put God first. In fact, some people are mocked or even persecuted for doing so.

We don't hear the word *Gnosticism* used to reflect what is happening in our contemporary society. But like the Colossians, we, too, are faced with false teachings that aim to cause us to stray from God with mixtures of theologies and philosophies that can leave us feeling confused and empty.

Another reason Paul wrote to the Colossians was to instruct the early believers in how to walk in this world as a Christian—a follower of Christ who lives in personal relationship with Him—in practical ways. The first chapter of Colossians alone includes twelve different lessons that will help you enjoy your life and stay strong in your faith each day. You may not be able to incorporate all of them into your

life right away, but if you choose a few of the ones that seem most important for you and study them and apply them to your life, they will help you mature and live the life Jesus died for you to live.

Other highlights of Colossians include but are not limited to:

- The fact that we have been rescued from darkness and forgiven of sin (Col. 1:13–14)
- The truth that we are reconciled to God through Christ and can live in right relationship with Him (Col. 1:21–23)
- Paul’s powerful teaching that Christ in us is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27)
- The reminder that Christ has reconciled us to God and that in Him we are complete, lacking nothing, and fully forgiven (Col. 1:22; 2:10, 13)
- Paul’s comments on the importance of representing God well by being compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, and loving toward others (Col. 3:12–14)
- The instruction to let the peace of God rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15)
- The exhortation to do everything as though we are doing it for God, not for other people (Col. 3:23)

My prayer for you as you make your way through this book is that Jesus will become more real to you than ever, and that Paul’s devotion and passion for Jesus will inspire you to love

Him and walk with Him even more closely than you already do, putting Him first in every area of your life.

*Key Truths in Colossians:*

- Jesus deserves first place in every area of our lives, and putting Him first should be a priority for us (Col. 1:15–20).
- Jesus' victory on the cross empowers us to overcome spiritual darkness and confusion (Col. 2:15).
- We are to set our minds on the things that have eternal value and keep them set on them, not allowing our thoughts to waver (Col. 3:1-4).
- The words of our mouths are powerful, and they are to be filled with grace (Col. 4:6).

## CHAPTER 1



# DISCOVERING AND PURSUING GOD'S WILL



## An Overview of Colossians 1

Colossians chapter 1 is one of the most powerful chapters in the New Testament. It includes Paul's greeting to the Colossians, which is more meaningful than a casual reading of it would suggest, and twelve key lessons for anyone who wants to grow spiritually. Learning and applying all these lessons could take years, but if you choose just a few to start with and focus on them over and over again and begin practicing them, they will transform your life and keep you on the path toward spiritual maturity. I will elaborate on each one in my commentary on their corresponding verses, but I am listing them here for you so you can begin to see what a powerful chapter Colossians 1 is.

1. The most important thing you can do in your practical, everyday life is to make sure you are living in the will of God (Col. 1:1).
2. Living holy lives should be our goal (Col. 1:2).
3. Being thankful can change your life and make every day better (Col. 1:3).
4. Focusing on your faith and living by it—trusting God no matter what—will keep you spiritually strong (Col. 1:4).

5. Love is what distinguishes believers from those who do not know Christ, and we are to live lives of love (Col. 1:4).
6. Whatever you do, hold on to your hope and do not let the devil steal it (Col. 1:5).
7. Paul's apostolic prayer will help you understand all that belongs to you in Christ, and it is a life-changing way to pray for yourself and others (Col. 1:9–12).
8. We have everything we need in Christ (Col. 1:13–14).
9. Jesus is before and above everything else. Put Him first (Col. 1:15–18).
10. Christians can rejoice in suffering (Col. 1:24).
11. Part of the Christian life involves being willing to be a servant to God and others (Col. 1:24–25).
12. Christ in you is the hope of glory, and Paul's goal was to present every believer mature in Christ (Col. 1:27–28).

Colossians 1 is filled with insight and revelation for your life. Many people, myself included, have studied this chapter for years and are still finding new treasures and spiritual strength in it. I pray the same will be true for you.

### Personal Reflection

Which lessons from Colossians 1 do you believe you need most in your life right now?

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## The Importance of Being in God's Will

*Colossians 1:1*

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.*

Colossians 1:1 is a short verse, but as we study it carefully, we realize that it is packed with meaning. Notice first that Paul says he is “an apostle,” which in this case simply means a person sent by God. Next we see that Paul is an apostle “of *Christ Jesus*” (emphasis mine). This is important because it tells us that Paul is serving God, not himself or other people. Before Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9), he was known for the zeal with which he persecuted Christians. He did everything he could to stop the cause of Christ. Once God touched him and changed his life, he poured all of his energy into loving Him and building His kingdom. The greatest fulfillment in life comes from belonging to God. And the best way we can spend our lives is to be in His will, enjoy being in a personal relationship with Him, serve Him, and help others know and grow in Him.

Notice also that Paul is an apostle “by the will of God.” This is important because, as Christians, we want to follow God’s will. If we are not doing what we do because we truly believe it’s God’s will for us, how can we ever do it well or enjoy it?

Many times when I teach about being in the will of God, people ask, “How can I know if I am in the will of God?” Here are two simple ways:

**1. *You will enjoy it.***

I mentioned John 10:10 in the introduction to this book. It tells us that Jesus came so that we may “have *and* enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]” (AMP). God’s will for you will not be something that makes you miserable all the time. You may face challenges as you pursue it, or you may be required to make sacrifices, but if it is God’s will for you, He will give you the wisdom and grace to overcome any difficulty. And I believe you will enjoy the work you do in serving God.

**2. *You will be equipped for it.***

I believe that when what we are doing is in the will of God, we will be good at it. God gives us the skills, gifts, and abilities to fulfill His will for our lives. He does not call us to do something without equipping us for it.

You may have to work, study, or prepare in some other way to carry out His call on your life, but you will have an aptitude for it and feel at ease in it. I have become very comfortable doing what I do as a teacher of God’s Word. I have learned some lessons about doing it effectively, and I do work at it, but teaching is not hard for me because I teach by the will of God.

Think about a woman who is called and designed to be a stay-at-home mom. If that is what God wants her to do, but

she tries to do something else because she thinks it is what she needs to do to be a modern woman, she will be miserable. She needs to know what God's will is for her life and put her time and energy into *that*, as well as being a wife and mother. It may sound like a daunting task, but God can enable you to do whatever He wants you to do.

My hope for you is that you reach the point where you can say, "I want to do what God wants me to do. I'm not going to compare myself with anybody else. I won't compete with anybody else. I just want to be in my place doing what God wants me to do."

Finding God's will for your life is not difficult: You step out and try things until you find what is comfortable for you. "Comfortable" doesn't necessarily mean easy. You will likely have to work at it, but you will know in your heart that it is what you are supposed to be doing, and it will bring you peace and joy.

Taking risks and walking by faith are necessary as you seek to discover God's will. When you take a step of faith, you must be willing to be wrong in order to find out if you are right. Sometimes we are excessively bothered by the idea of being wrong, but that is part of the way we learn. When we realize we need to change direction, we can simply say, "I thought that was what God wanted. I stepped out. I tried it, but it's not right. I can check that off my list and go on to the next thing." Being in the will of God is much more important than trying to avoid being wrong.

When I first sensed God's call on my life, I believed His will was for me to serve Him, but I didn't know exactly what He

wanted me to do. I wanted Him to use me, so I started saying yes to every opportunity that came my way. I went to work in the church nursery, and after only a week or two I knew that was not the place for me. I also tried street evangelism, and while I realize the value of that work, I did not have the grace to do it. I tried to be a secretary to my pastor, but after one day, he told me it wasn't working and it was not the right spot for me. When I began to teach God's Word, I found my place. Teaching is what God called, equipped, and anointed me to do, and in pursuing my calling, I am in the center of His will for my life.

God's will for your life will not be the same as His will for other people's lives. If we compare our gifts or callings with others', or if we feel guilty that we struggle to serve God in ways that come easily to others, we will not produce good fruit for God's kingdom. It's important for each person to determine what His will is for them and then pursue it wholeheartedly.

The key lesson of Colossians 1:1 is to believe that whatever you are doing is God's will for you at that time in your life. Over the course of your life, certain things may change. God's will for you today may not be His will for you ten years from now. For example, for many years when our ministry hosted conferences, I spoke in five sessions every weekend. Then I started speaking in only four sessions. Recently, I began to feel that it was God's will for this ministry to do three sessions. This has proven to be the right scheduling decision for us, and people have responded positively to the change. Being continually in God's will requires us to be willing to make changes when God leads us to do so.

Also in Colossians 1:1, Paul mentions that Timothy is with him. He thinks of Timothy as his “true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2). He knew Timothy’s mother and grandmother as women of “sincere faith” (2 Tim. 1:5). He invested time and energy in Timothy and apparently cared about him, believed in him, and earnestly wanted him to succeed. He wrote 1 and 2 Timothy to encourage him as a young minister. At many times during his ministry, Paul made an effort to train and encourage young ministers, and we should also be willing to do that as God leads us. Timothy was one of those young men in whom Paul invested, and you can read more of Paul’s instructions and advice to him in 1 and 2 Timothy.

### Personal Reflection

Do you believe that what you are doing in your life right now is in the will of God? How has God led you to that conclusion?

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## CHAPTER 2



# PAUL'S HEART FOR BELIEVERS



## Belonging to God Completely

*Colossians 1:2*

*To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.*

Sometimes we skim past verses such as Colossians 1:2, but I want to call your attention to some important words and ideas in it. Paul says he is writing to “God’s holy people in Colossae.” In the Amplified Bible, Classic Edition, this reads “To the saints (the consecrated people of God) and believing *and* faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace (spiritual favor and blessing) to you and [heart] peace from God our Father.” When we see words in Scripture such as *saints* and *consecrated*, we may skip over them because we do not fully understand what they mean. When that happens, we miss the lessons we should gain from certain verses, words, or phrases.

The words *holy people* in the New International Version (NIV) are translated *saints* in the Amplified Bible, Classic Edition and described as “consecrated people of God.” To be consecrated to God means to be set apart for a special use. This is important because it teaches us that from God’s perspective, when He saves us, we belong to Him. We have been

saved *out* of something so we can come *into* something—out of a low life into a high life, out of a selfish, self-centered life where we just live to please ourselves into a life of serving others and being vessels through which God can do what He wants. He is the head; we are the body. In other words, He gives the direction for our lives, and we should obediently follow it.

### *God Works through People*

The idea of being consecrated so God can use us is significant because when He wants to accomplish something, He works through people. When we pray for God to do something, He almost always works through human instruments to make it happen. Part of what makes our Christian experience interesting is letting God use us and seeing Him use others in our own lives.

Remember, to be consecrated means to be set apart for a special use, and all believers can be used by God. Instead of thinking pastors, Bible teachers, or worship leaders are the only ones God can use, know that God can use you, too. *You* are consecrated. *You* are set apart for God's use. There is something only you can do the way you can do it, and it is important to God's plan that you find what that is and start doing it.

Obviously, God will accomplish what He wants to accomplish. If you and I don't do our part, He will find someone else to do what is needed. But I believe one of the keys to

being happy and fulfilled is to be in the will of God, surrendered to Him, making ourselves available for Him to use as He sees fit.

As believers, we do not belong to ourselves, and the things we call “ours” do not truly belong to us either. We were bought with a price (Christ’s life), and we belong to God. His Spirit lives in us. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? *You are not your own*; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (emphasis mine).

### Personal Reflection

How has God worked through the people in your life?

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### *Dedicate Yourself to God*

Paul also writes about letting God use us in Romans 12:1: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” This is New Covenant thinking. Under the Old Covenant, people tried to please God with animal sacrifices. But God reached a point where He no longer wanted animal sacrifices. He wanted people with whom He could be in relationship, people He could work through—people who are full of life, take God-inspired action, and are enthusiastic and excited about life.

Every day, you can choose to dedicate yourself to the Lord as a living sacrifice. You can dedicate your eyes by being careful about what you watch and look at, your ears by being careful about what you listen to, your mouth by being careful about what you say, and your feet by being careful about where you go. For example, you can choose before you arrive at your job each morning not to listen to or spread gossip or complain. You can decide before you go on a business trip that you will not do things that you would not want your family to know about.

When we belong to God and live consecrated lives, we separate ourselves from the evil things in the world and its values. People may laugh at us or reject us, but we should remain committed to God. It is important not to feel superior to them or to judge them, but to pray for them instead. God loves them just as He loves us. But part of belonging

to Him means making choices other people may not like or agree with.

I encourage you to wake up every morning thinking, *I belong to God. Everything about me is dedicated to Him. God lives in me, and I live in Him. I'm in Him, and He is in me. Greater is He that is in me than He that is in the world* (1 John 4:4). *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* (Phil. 4:13). That kind of thinking and self-talk will help you stay connected to God and give you the courage and confidence to believe God can use you and to pursue the special purpose for which you are set apart.

### Personal Reflection

What has God revealed to you about the special way He wants to use you? How are you doing your best to prepare yourself for it?

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### *Grace and Peace*

Colossians is one of Paul's most personal letters, which is interesting because, as I mentioned in the introduction, he had never met the believers in Colossae. His love for God, however, meant that he also had a great love for God's people. And his pastoral heart inspired him to care about Christians everywhere, even if he did not have personal relationships with them.

If you or I were to write a letter to people we had never met, we might be somewhat reserved in our language and greet them with something like "Hello. I hope you are doing well." But Paul greets the Colossians the same way he greets the people in churches he knew personally, with his usual words: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father."

His greeting was more powerful than we might first realize because he extends to his readers the amazing grace of God and the peace that surpasses all understanding. Clearly, Paul wanted the Colossians to enjoy both grace and peace, and he knew they could only experience peace if they understood and knew how to receive God's grace.

I know this from personal experience, because for a long time I struggled to change things in my life. There were things about myself, others, and my circumstances that I knew needed to be different, and I tried to make that happen in my own strength. I had to learn that only God can change things for us. When we try to do it ourselves, we end up striving and frustrated—with no peace. The more I learned to stop striving and receive God's grace, the more peace I had in my life.

We can think about grace in several ways. There is grace we say before a meal, and there is the grace of a beautiful ballet dancer. But I want to focus on two ways grace applies to our spiritual lives. First, grace is God's undeserved favor. Second, grace is God's ability and power to help us do whatever we need to do in life. It makes seemingly impossible things possible, and it enables us to do difficult things with ease. Over the years I have come up with a personal definition of grace: to me, grace is God's undeserved favor and His power that enables us to do with ease what we could never do on our own with any amount of struggle or self-effort.

When I hear about people who have no peace in their lives, I feel sorry for them. No matter what else people may have—a great education, good looks, an engaging personality, power, influence, or plenty of money—it all becomes a burden unless they also have peace. I think perhaps people who do not have peace have not yet learned about living by God's grace. Salvation comes to us by grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8), and we are to live our everyday lives by grace through faith, just as we were saved “by grace” through faith, if we want to live in peace. Paul understood this, and in just a few words he communicated this powerful hope to the Colossians in the very beginning of his letter to them.

Personal Reflection

How has receiving the grace of God brought peace to you?

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## Thanksgiving and Prayer

*Colossians 1:3*

*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
when we pray for you.*

Paul writes often in his letters about being thankful. He writes of it here and in other places in Colossians (2:6–7, 3:15, 3:17, 4:2), where I will elaborate more on the power of thankfulness. Here he says, “We *always* thank God” (emphasis mine). How many of us thank God at all times? I believe the best way to start and end each day is to intentionally find several things for which we can thank God. As we go through the day, we should look for all the ways He blesses us and continue to thank Him. Being consciously aware of God’s blessings and being thankful are important ways to live happy lives.

Learning to live as a thankful person can change your life. We can and should thank God for everything—even the most basic things such as being able to walk, talk, see, and hear. We can be thankful that we have something fruitful to do each day and for each opportunity He gives us. We can thank Him for our families and friends and even for things like clean water and homes that are heated and cooled. Many people in the world do not have the blessings we enjoy, so we

need to be grateful for everything He provides for us. We can always be thankful that we know Him and that He knows and loves us, which is the biggest blessing of all.

### Personal Reflection

What are some of the things you thank God for when you pray?

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