

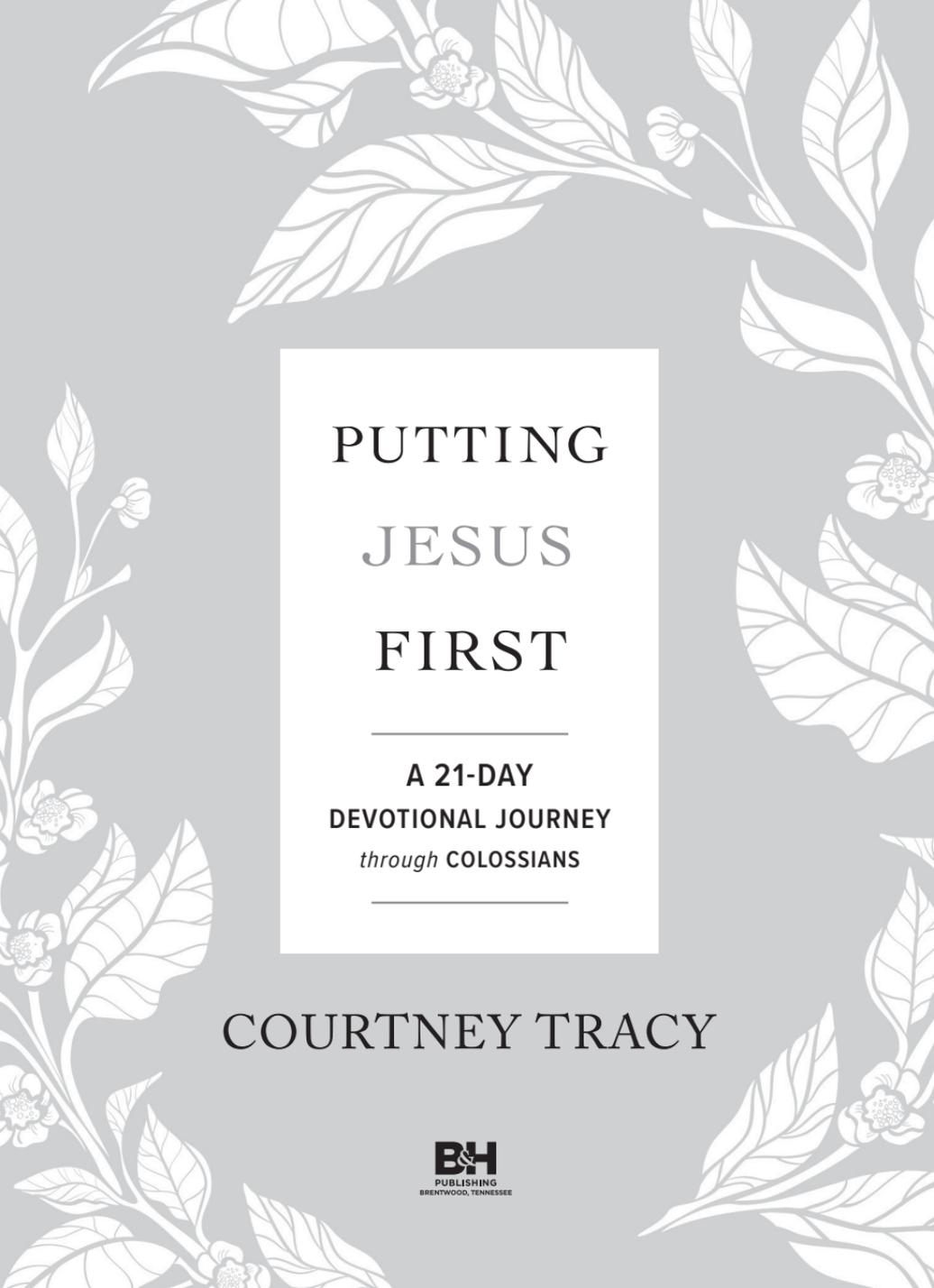
PUTTING
JESUS
FIRST

A 21-DAY
DEVOTIONAL JOURNEY
through COLOSSIANS

COURTNEY TRACY



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COURTNEY TRACY

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To Dakota—who knows me best and points me to the surpassing worth of Christ every day in the unseen moments, reminding me always to keep putting Jesus first. I love you, and for countless reasons, I could not have completed this devotional book without you.

*To Collins, Thomas, and Charlee—who have kept on teaching me about the sufficiency of Christ and depending on Him and His strength in all things instead of my own.
Mommy loves you! Daddy loves you!
Jesus loves you most of all!*

To my editor, Ashley—thank you for faithfully keeping Jesus first, highest, and best and pointing me to His supremacy as you've come alongside me to write the words that are within these pages for His glory.

To my pastor, Ben—thank you for always faithfully preaching the good news of Jesus according to His Word and for reminding me to keep putting Jesus first as this little devotional book was coming together. I am so grateful for the way you shepherd your flock and point us to the Good Shepherd who is before all things and sustains all things!



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INTRODUCTION

Hi, friend! As you are opening up the pages of this devotional study, can I just say, *I'm so glad you're here*. Life can be, and often is, so demanding. I'm not sure what season of life you may be in right now, but I *am* sure that whatever it is, there truly is no shortage of people, places, jobs, and the like that demand our attention each and every day. Whatever God has in front of you at the moment, I totally understand how much intentionality it takes to carve out some time to spend in God's Word. As a wife and mother with three children five and under, I know how difficult this can be! But I also know the immense joy and unrivaled fruit it produces in the life of the believer when we do choose to carve out time to meet with God each day in His Word and in prayer.

I don't know your current age or life-stage. Perhaps you're like me—a busy mom. Maybe you're a high school student or in college—spending your days studying, going to classes, working, participating in sports, and of course, enjoying your social life. Or, maybe you're a working professional, trying to pull off that ever-elusive balance between work life and personal life. You might even be a woman with older kids, darting between school drop-offs and activities, or maybe your season of life looks like doting on and helping with those busy grandkids.

Regardless of what life looks like for you, we all live in a world full of distractions, responsibilities, and noise. So friend, one of my prayers for this devotional book is that it would help give you a daily, habitual practice of meeting with God both in His Word and in prayer—and that this practice will encourage you to press on to maturity in Christ. As we journey through the book of Colossians together over the next twenty-one days, we will see some major themes that are not only applicable to the original audience of the book but are just as applicable to us today. I can't wait to get started with you!

How exactly will we journey through Colossians together? you may be wondering. Great question!

I've set this devotional book up for you so that you are given two days each week to catch up if you miss a day, or to save those days to reflect or explore further the parts of Colossians we have covered that week. In other words, this monthlong, twenty-one-day devotional guide allows you to read five new devotionals a week with two “rest” days over the weekend (or whenever fits your schedule best) with one extra day at the end to wrap up. My hope in structuring your experience this way is that it will give you some flexibility (life happens!) if you get behind a day and makes room for other Bible reading or studying (I pray!) you're doing outside of this little devotional book.

Each day we'll walk through a few things. First, you'll **READ** a new passage in Colossians; then you'll **REFLECT** with me as we glean powerful principles that God wants us not only to learn but also to live out. After reflecting on the passage, you'll find some

questions I've provided to help you process and **RESPOND** to the passage on a personal level, so that the truths you've learned might make their way into your heart, mind, soul, and life! Each day you'll notice some new questions are featured. But here's a heads-up: each day will *also* include a few repeated questions you may see here or there. And that's on purpose! Those questions are:

1. What does today's passage teach me about God's character? (In other words, what you learned about God from today's passage!)
2. What hope does Jesus offer these Colossians and us today?
3. How can you live in response to this truth today? Because God is _____, I will _____.

Wait, why are we repeating these questions? Another great question. For two reasons. First, focusing on God's character reminds us that the Bible is a book about God. Every verse and passage we read in our Bibles tells us about *Him*. We can find His character on display in all of the Bible! To help you answer this question with specificity, I've included **a list of God's attributes and characteristics** in this devotional guide (*attributes* is just a fancy word for God's character traits). You'll find that list in the back of the book on page 176. Please use this resource as you reflect on His character each day. Think of it like a word bank to help jog your thoughts and learn more about God! I have loved and used a resource like this myself many times in my own reading and studying of God's

Word, so I pray this will be a blessing and help you as we walk through Colossians over the next several weeks!

Second, these repeated questions are offered not only to help you understand God's character on a *head* level but to connect on the *heart* level too—and more than that, to move out all the way into your *actions* in daily life (you'll notice that the third question noted above is meant to help you take what you've learned about God and exemplify or honor the attribute you identified about God). My prayer for you as we journey through Colossians together is not just that you learn some truths about God but that these truths will transform your heart and mind and that you respond to God's truth by living them out in your everyday life. That you will make a practice every day, in every circumstance, of putting Jesus first in your life above everything else.

To close each day, I've provided a **PRAYER** that will help you thank God for all He's teaching you, and as a bonus, you'll also find an **EXPLORE MORE** section added onto each day, just in case you happen to resonate strongly with a certain theme and want to learn more about it in the Bible. No pressure on that section—it's not as if you didn't finish your devotional reading for the day if you don't explore that whole section. It's just there to help you dive deeper if you prefer or have the extra time. Perhaps you can come back to these "explore more" questions on a day that there is no new devotional reading, or maybe even return to them the next time you pick up this devotional guide to walk through Colossians again.

On top of that, I've tucked away some **dive deeper tips** in the back of the book on page 177 for your convenience. If you find yourself curious about certain things you read, these study tips will

give you the tools you need to help clarify things, dive deeper into the passages you're reading, and ultimately get the most out of the book of Colossians as we explore it together.

Ultimately, my heart for this devotional book is that you see the beauty and matchless worth of Jesus in a world that beckons us to bow our knees to other, lesser gods of our time (then and now!) and put Jesus where He belongs in your life: above all things. Whether you use this as a supplement to your time spent in God's Word or a launching pad into your Bible reading and studying of God's Word, (maybe you've always been intimidated to study the Bible—I know this feeling; so perhaps this devotional guide will turn out to be the thing that helps you take a step closer to doing that!), I hope this journey through Colossians gives you a place to develop a daily rhythm of meeting with God. I also hope the extras in this book offer you helpful Bible reading and studying tips that you can take with you in this lifelong, daily practice of meeting with God in His Word and in prayer so that, over the long haul, your days meeting with God will add up to a *whole life* shaped by the glory, beauty, and riches of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, now that you're prepared for what's ahead in the journey, I'll wrap up today's introduction with a few questions for you to consider before we embark on our journey through this wonderful book of the Bible, and I'll also offer two prayers. One is a prayer I am praying for you, right from the book of Colossians itself. The second is a prayer you can pray to the Father to prepare your heart for this journey. I can't wait to read and reflect deeply on the surpassing worth of Christ and the implications this has on every other part of our lives as we study Colossians together, friend.

RESPOND

1 / What are you looking forward to most about this devotional guide? What is one attainable goal you can set for yourself as we explore Colossians together?

2 / What is your greatest hope for this journey through Colossians? Your greatest fear, if any?

3 / Have you ever read through the whole book of Colossians before? Why or why not?

4 / Think through your life and schedule over the next twenty-one days. Of all the things ahead of you, what is most likely to distract you from this journey through Colossians? How can you anticipate these distractions and make a plan to overcome them?

5 / If you could pray one thing over this twenty-one-day journey, what would it be? Take some time to ask God for this right now. (And if you need some help finding the words, use the prayer below!)

COURTNEY'S PRAYER FOR YOU

Heavenly Father, I pray for this sister picking up this devotional guide through Colossians. I pray, God, that she may be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of You, fully pleasing to You: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of who You are . . . (Col. 1:9–10). I pray that her heart may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of Your great gospel mystery, which is Christ . . . (Col. 2:2). And Father, I pray that as she has received Christ Jesus the Lord, Your Son, she would so “walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as [she] was taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6–7).

A PRAYER FOR YOU TO PRAY

Father, help me make the time in all the busyness of the next twenty-one days to set aside the never-ending distractions and give You the time and attention You rightly deserve. As I explore Colossians over the next few weeks, God, please give me a greater awe and love for You as I grow in my knowledge of who You are through Your Word. I pray that the Holy Spirit, who intercedes for me before You, Father, will help me understand Your Word more deeply, and ultimately, help me put Jesus first and at the center in my life. I ask that You guard me against making this devotional time just another thing to check off the list and accomplish but instead come to it daily so that I might meet with You and behold what YOU have accomplished already on my behalf through Christ. Reveal Yourself to me through Your Word, Lord, and let Your will be done in and through this devotional guide and in me as I journey through Colossians. Amen.



A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

READ / *Colossians 1–4*

REFLECT / In all your excitement for a new adventure or social event, have you ever started on a journey somewhere without a clear, long look at the map first? I'm sure we've all done that at some point. Whether it's on a hike in the mountains or some leg of the journey in our personal lives, we've all made the mistake of taking steps before we know the lay of the land.

That can happen with the Bible sometimes, too. We can get so excited to dive into a specific passage, that we forget to see the larger picture it fits in. We forget it exists in a larger landscape—a context we'd be lost without. To help us avoid getting lost on our twenty-one-day journey through Colossians together, let's take today to consider the larger lay of the land before we walk through it. To get a bird's-eye view of Colossians (or any book of the Bible), here are some good questions we'll need to consider:

Who wrote it?

This question helps us identify the author, which for Colossians, is the apostle Paul. (More on him tomorrow!)

How was it written?

This question helps us identify the style of writing so that we might interpret it accordingly. Some books of the Bible were written as poetry or history or prophecy. The book of Colossians, though, is written as an “epistle,” which just means it’s a *letter*. Paul wrote several other letters found in the New Testament. Some of those include Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and of course, one more of the thirteen letters Paul wrote, Colossians.

To whom was it written?

This question helps us identify the original audience of this letter and adds to our understanding of the writer’s purpose. Having a better understanding of who this letter was originally written to helps us keep the letter within its proper context. This letter was written to the church in Colossae and addresses the current needs and issues happening within the church at the time. A unique aspect about this letter though is that Paul never visited this church. He received a report from a guy named Epaphras (Col. 1:7)—more on him later—who came to Rome to seek Paul’s response on the false teaching that was starting to pop up in the church in Colossae. These false teachers were ultimately trying to diminish the sufficiency of Christ, meaning, they were teaching that other things were necessary for salvation *on top of* Christ’s finished work on the cross. So, in this short letter written to the Colossians, Paul certainly and boldly responds to this issue. In every and any way, Paul declares that Jesus alone is sufficient and supreme over all things (*preeminent* is the big word he uses, as we’ll see later).

When was it written?

This question helps us better understand the original audience's current experiences as Christians as they live during a certain time period. It's easy for us to picture the original audience as people who look and act just like you and me or live in a culture with the same norms as our culture. But asking the *when* question helps us pull them out of our moment in time, placing them back where they belong—within their own moment in history. For the book of Colossians, this was most likely around AD 62 while Paul was in prison in Rome.

Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians around the same time he penned his letter to Philemon and his letter to the Ephesians. Here are some other things happening during this time period that would be helpful to keep in mind as you study: this church, like many churches around this time period, was young (young is a loose word within this context, meaning they had only been around for five to ten—or maybe up to fifteen—years).

So, like many other churches that had been springing up, the Christians at the church in Colossae, are young. They are still immature, meaning they still have a lot of growing to do as believers. That's not a bad thing; it's just that they are still learning. When you're still learning something, you don't yet understand everything. You may make a mistake or get sidetracked. You may even be unable to tell the difference from what is correct and incorrect, true or false, because again, you're still learning about it. This was the case for the Colossians, which is part of the reason Paul is writing to them. He wants to help form them and grow them into Christlike maturity. This brings us to our last question to consider.

Why was it written?

This question helps us understand the situation that provoked the letter. As details in the letter reveal (and as many scholars help us see), Paul is writing to the church in Colossae because these young Christians need to be encouraged in the hope of the gospel, and they need to be reminded that the sufficiency of Christ always has been and always will be enough. Nothing could ever add to the completely finished work of Jesus to pay the price our sin required before a just and holy God. This young church needed to be reminded that nothing is greater in the life of the Christian than the surpassing worth of Christ. He is our highest joy. He is before all, above all, in all, and the Creator and Sustainer of all. He is the goal of creation. He is completely sufficient. He is first and best, greatest and highest. He is preeminent.

Jesus is the center of every single part of our lives, and who Jesus is has implications for every single part of our lives, too. Paul writes the words of this letter to the Colossians so they would not be led astray by the false teaching that has begun to take root in the church at this time and instead to hold fast to the hope they already have in Christ Jesus.

Man, isn't this exactly the reminder you and I need today? How easily we forget the sufficiency of Christ and instead of resting in His righteousness and the salvation we receive as a free gift through Him, we place our hope in lesser things or fall back into thinking that the only way to approach God is to follow a set of rules or do certain things in order to receive forgiveness from God. In a world full of distractions and desires that occupy our time and compete for our highest joy and centrality in our life, we need help

to remember He is first and highest and central and worthy and ultimate and best. Thank You, Lord, for the book of Colossians that helps us remember the complete sufficiency and supremacy of Jesus! He is *enough*. And He is *higher* than all the other stuff that tries to distract us!

So there you have it. We've got our bird's-eye view—our bearings. We know the *who*, the *how*, the *when*, and the *why* surrounding this letter to the Colossians. We have a clearer picture of the terrain we're walking through together. Now that you have some background information, I'm going to ask you to do something you might call me crazy for—you ready?

Spend today (or various parts of today) reading this letter to the Colossians all the way through.

Nope, you didn't misread that. You read that right! Every day in this devotional, we will narrow in on one short passage, but *today's* task is to take the whole book into consideration. If that sounds intimidating to you, here are two pieces of great news. One, it's a super short book of the Bible. Only four quick chapters! You can do it. Whether you read it yourself or listen to it, or both, it won't take nearly as long as you think it will.

Two, reading the text will help us keep the big picture of the book within context. Think about it: if you or I were reading a letter we received from someone, they wouldn't want us to start randomly in the middle somewhere, right? They'd want us to read the whole letter, start to finish. In this way, it is helpful to read Colossians in the way it was intended to be read, which is all the way through.

If you start reading and don't understand something along the way, no worries. Just make a note of it and keep going. The goal is just to read it. In fact, I will encourage you a few more times throughout this journey to practice this technique called *repeated reading*. Think of this like moments in the journey where we stop, catch our breath, and look at the map again, reorienting ourselves to the big picture so that we can keep moving forward in confidence!

After you finish reading it once all the way through, give yourself a massive pat on the back and spend a short time in prayer, thanking God for His Word. Next, take some time to answer the reflection questions below to help you process what you've taken in. And then get ready—tomorrow we start breaking the big picture down, moving through our journey leg by leg.

RESPOND

1 / Have you ever gotten lost or felt disoriented in a new place where you didn't know the lay of the land? What was that like? How is this similar to reading Scripture without context?

2 / What fears do you have about reading large chunks of Scripture? What excites you about this?

3 / Now that you've read the book in its entirety, what are some themes or repeated ideas you noticed so far in the book of Colossians? What about God's character specifically stands out to you that you noticed after your first pass through the book of Colossians?

4 / What parts of your reading encouraged you? Challenged you?

5 / What places in your reading left you confused? Keep a list so that you can go back to your questions and answer them later, as you learn more.

Keep in Mind: There will be plenty of times in our Bible reading when we may not always get our questions answered right away. You may even have questions that do not get answered after you finish this devotional guide—that's okay! Reading the Bible over the long haul helps you here. You may read some other part of God's Word years from now that sheds light on some of the questions raised in this journey through Colossians. That's the beauty of the Bible—it is inexhaustible! As you read more of it over time, it offers greater clarity to the parts you were once foggy about. So

don't be intimidated by questions—they are your friend, and you'll get answers to them as you grow over a lifetime. So ask the questions. Search the Scriptures for your answer where you can. Trust God and His character if your question goes unanswered for now, and trust Him to reveal that answer to you if that is His will and in His perfect timing. Then, keep going, sister.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, I thank You for your unchanging Word. I thank You for Your unchanging character. I thank You that through Christ I have been reconciled to You for all of eternity. I ask that as I continue forward in this journey through Colossians, You would give me eyes to clearly see Your character, the good news of the gospel, and the hope that Jesus offers. I pray that I would not just learn about You but grow to know You and love You more. In the name of Jesus, amen.

EXPLORE MORE

If you're up for it, or have extra time, consider these connections to shed some light on your reading:

Read Psalm 98:3, and consider how it connects to what Colossians 1:5–6 says about the whole world.

Read Psalm 89:27 and Romans 8:29, and consider how these verses connect to Colossians 1:15.

Consider how John 1:1–3; John 8:58; Romans 11:36; and 1 Corinthians 8:6 relate to Colossians 1:16–17.

Consider how Genesis 3:15 and John 12:31 connect with Colossians 2:15.

Read Philippians 3:21 and 1 John 3:2, and consider how these passages help you better understand Colossians 3:4.

Consider how Exodus 30:35 sheds light on what “seasoned with salt” means in Colossians 4:6.

IN ALL THE BUSYNESS, bustle, and noise of life, do you find it hard to keep first things first? Do you find it difficult to keep Jesus as top priority? You're not alone.

Thankfully, God's Word—especially the book of Colossians—helps us not only remember Jesus, but position him as highest and best in our lives. In this warm and encouraging devotional, Courtney Tracy walks with you through powerful lessons learned in Colossians, and helps you discover the life-changing power of treasuring Jesus above all things. Each day includes a passage to *read*, a devotional entry to help you *reflect*, insightful questions to help you *respond*, and a *prayer* to help you approach God in confidence. On top of that, this devotional offers you:

- A beautiful experience and space each day for you to actively reflect on God's Word, no matter how busy your day is.
- A twenty-one day format so you can build a practical habit of prioritizing your time with Jesus daily.
- Deep gospel truths that offer daily encouragement to walk in your new identity.

Jesus reigns supreme over all things, including our noisy homes and busy schedules. Let's discover the joy that is ours when we live like that's true, putting him first!



COURTNEY TRACY is passionate about Jesus and sharing the hope of the gospel with those around her. She loves the local church and joyfully serves the Lord there by using her teaching and musical gifts in women's, children's, and worship ministry. She enjoys growing in her love for God by studying the Bible, and seeing other women do the same.

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