



*Small Group Discussion Guide*



## PREPARATION

### STUDY

Spend the week studying Colossians 1:13–23. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

### DETERMINE

Determine which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

### PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

### LANDING POINT

Believe who Jesus is. Receive what He has done.



## GROUP DISCUSSION

❑ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

❑ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

❑ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

❑ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

# JESUS ALONE

Tell me if you've heard this illustration before: Different religions are like a bunch of different blind men trying to figure out what an elephant is. One man touches the nose and says it is a large snake. Another touches the leg and says it's a tree stump. Another touches the ear and says it's a leather coat. Another touches the tail and says it's a little furry mouse. The point of the illustration is that each religion only gets one part of the entire spiritual picture. Our culture says there are many paths to God and that each path is equally valid.

But in that metaphor ALL of the blind men are wrong. Not one of them thinks it's an elephant, they all think it's something else. So that metaphor doesn't prove that all paths are equally valid. All it really proves is that we cannot discover who God is on our own, with human reason alone. The only way to know God is by His revealing Himself to us.

The Bible is unabashedly clear that Jesus is the only way to heaven (John 14:6). For a Christian, that really isn't up for debate. You cannot call yourself a Christian and say, "Well, Jesus is true for me, but other people might find another way to heaven." The Bible simply doesn't allow for that.

However, that doesn't make the gospel *exclusive*. In fact, every time the gospel is mentioned, Scripture says it is available to everyone—*every* nation, tribe, and tongue. Male and female, slave and free (Galatians 3:28). *All* who are thirsty (Isaiah 55:1). *All* who are weary and heavy laden (Matthew 11:28–30). God says He does not want anyone to perish, but for *all* to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). There is only one way, but that one way is open to *all* people. It's not exclusive at all. It's inclusive. The gate may be narrow, but it is swung wide open.

**Q:** *Do you struggle that Jesus is the only way to heaven, the only one worthy of our worship? Why or why not?*

**Q:** *How can we share the open-door policy of the gospel without compromising the truth that Jesus is the only way to heaven?*



Select 2–3 questions to discuss as a group.

## WE WORSHIP JESUS ALONE BECAUSE OF ...

Our passage today tells us *why* we worship Jesus alone, why there is no other like Him, no one else worthy of our worship. First, because of who He is, and then because of what He has done.

### WHO HE IS

Simply put, we worship Jesus because He *is* God. Anyone who says anything less than that about Jesus really doesn't understand who Jesus Himself said He is. Over and over in the Gospels, Jesus claimed to not only be the Son of God, but to be God Himself. It's why people so often wanted to stone Him for blasphemy. In addition to the more subtle ways He alluded to his divinity, Jesus explicitly said, "I and the Father are one," (John 10:30), and "If you had known Me, you would know My Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him" (John 14:7).

*The Image of the Invisible God (v. 15):* Jesus doesn't just tell us who God is, He shows us who God is. Because He is the "exact expression of His nature" (Hebrews 1:2) and "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), Jesus was God in a form that we could see. This is one of the reasons that Jesus came, so God could show us firsthand what He was like. In Jesus, we see how God would handle a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. We see how God would handle religious leaders who nitpicked the law but mistreated people. We see the types of people God would pick as His disciples. We see how God would treat the sinners and the outcasts.

God had been telling His people who He was for thousands of years. Now He was going to show them. If we want to know who God is, we look at Jesus. If we want to know how God would handle a particular situation, we look at Jesus. If we want to know what God would say or do, we look at what Jesus said and did.

*Firstborn of All Creation (v. 15):* One of the very first official councils of the Church, the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., was convened to settle a dispute about Christ's relationship to the Father. Arius, a church leader in Alexandria, was teaching that Jesus was not eternal but had been created by God before the world was made; that Jesus was not actually God but His special first-created son of God. The Nicene Creed countered this false teaching by describing Christ as "begotten not made" and being "of one substance with the Father." *Begotten* means that Jesus comes from the Father but was not created by Him. *Firstborn of all Creation* does not mean that there was a time when Jesus was not and then He was born or created. Jesus has existed forever, just like the Father (John 1). He is not a creature like we are; He is divine. Firstborn means He has the status of a firstborn son—the heir. He is above all Creation in status. Nothing in Creation compares to Him. He has no rival. He has no equal.



*Creator and Sustainer (v. 16–17):* Paul agrees with the introduction to the Gospel of John that all things were created by Jesus and through Jesus. Jesus is the Word of God, and God *spoke* the universe into being (John 1:1–2). And in Him all things hold together. Because the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—created the universe and sustains the universe, He is the *only* person or thing worthy to be worshipped. Paul writes in Romans that we commit sin when we worship the creature instead of the Creator. When we center our lives around money or power or pleasure or anything other than Jesus, we are worshipping something God has created rather than the Creator Himself. We elevate the gift rather than the Giver (Romans 1:18–25).

*Head of the Church (v 18):* Jesus is the Head of the Church, the body of Christ. Not just the leader of the Church, but the *head*—the true and only source of life for the body.

🔗: *Why does it matter that Jesus was begotten of the Father and not made?*

🔗: *How does that affect who He is, why He came and how effective His sacrifice was for us? How does it affect our relationship with Him?*

## WHAT HE HAS DONE

Paul also calls us to worship Jesus alone because He has:

- *Rescued* us from the domain of darkness (v. 13).
- *Redeemed* us from slavery to sin (v. 14).
- *Reconciled* us to God the Father (v. 20–22).

In Christ, God has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of light. He has redeemed us—bought us back—from slavery to sin with His precious blood (1 Peter 1:19). Therefore, we no longer belong to ourselves. We have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). We are now His people, His kingdom. We belong to Him. Jesus has changed our citizenship; we are now citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20). Therefore, we worship Jesus alone as our King.

Q: *How have you personally experienced freedom in Christ?*

Q: *In what areas do you struggle to honor Jesus as king of your life? In what ways do you try to put yourself on the throne instead?*



LIVE

Select 2–3 questions from this section to answer.

## WORSHIP JESUS ALONE

We were created to worship. C.S. Lewis wrote that people spontaneously praise whatever they value, and they even invite other people to praise it, too. “Isn’t that Porsche amazing?” “Wasn’t that food incredible?” Or as a friend once said to me, “Let me tell you about this new hairdryer I got. It changed my life!” No lie.

Our English word *worship* comes from an old English word *worthship*, which means to proclaim worth to something you consider precious and supremely valuable. Every day, we worship a thousand tiny little things instead of the Creator, the gifts instead of the Giver. If we value Jesus above all things, we should worship Him above all things. We should spontaneously praise Him all day long. Instead of just, “Wow, what a gorgeous sunset!” it should be “Wow, what an incredible God to make that sunset!”

If we were really, truly in love with Jesus, we would be praising Him all day long. We would worship Him alone as the Giver of all good gifts, the King of all kings, our Savior and our Redeemer. As Lewis wrote, “We must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God—drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight with that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable, hence hardly tolerable, bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression.”<sup>1</sup>

When we truly see the supreme value of Christ, we can’t help but worship Him.

Q: *How do you tend to worship the gift instead of the Giver?*

Q: *What are some reasons we should want to worship Jesus, both qualities about Him and things has He done?*

## WORSHIP AS A LIFESTYLE

Worship is not *just* praising Jesus verbally with words or prayers or songs. It is also living our lives in a way that glorifies Him. Because He has redeemed us and we belong to Him, our lives should glorify Him in all that we say and do (1 Corinthians 6:20). As Paul writes in Romans, presenting our whole lives as a living sacrifice to God—*that* is our spiritual worship (Romans 12:1–2).

In our passage, Paul writes that we were once hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. But Christ has redeemed us and has transferred us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, to present us holy and blameless to Him in heaven. Not that we work harder to be more holy, but that the Holy Spirit works in us, changing us from the inside out, growing His fruit in us, so our whole lives become an act of worship.

Q: *Why would our living holy lives as Christians bring Jesus glory?*

Q: *Choose one area of your life—your work, a hobby, your family, etc. How can you use that part of your life to glorify Jesus?*



## LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

Our response to who Jesus is and what He has done for us is simply to worship, both with our words and with our actions. To believe what He has done and receive His free gift of eternal life, and to let the Holy Spirit work in us to bear His fruit. To worship is to submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ and to let Him have control of our lives. To put Him on the throne. To serve and follow Him all the days our lives. Worship is not just what we say, but what we do, because the way we live shows whether we *really* honor Jesus as Lord of our lives.

♀: Describe someone you know who lives a lifestyle of worship. What are they like? What do they do? What don't they do?

♀: What is one specific thing you can change right now to honor Jesus as King over your life?



## PRAY

Be sure to allow extra prayer time for this activity so partners can really share.

Spend your prayer time this week in worship. Feel free to sing a hymn or praise song together. Or read the words of a hymn, praise song, or Psalm as a prayer. Or have each person simply spontaneously praise God. Whatever your group feels comfortable doing.



## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read Colossians 3:1–17 and reflect on what it means to live a lifestyle of worship.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



**THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD** “Jesus is absolutely in the middle. If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. If you want to know what it means to be human, look at Jesus. If you want to know what love is, look at Jesus. If you want to know what grief is, look at Jesus. And keep looking until you’re not longer a spectator but part of His grand story.”<sup>2</sup>

**FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION** The Greek word used here is *prōtōtokos* (“firstborn,” GK 4758). Scholars explain Paul’s usage here by stating: “while often used in the literal sense of the first to come from the womb, here it takes on a metaphorical significance based on the ancient attribution of preeminence to the first to be born.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, “The LXX usually employs the word in reference to birth order. Among the Israelites, firstborn sons possessed privileges not afforded to other progeny. This fact gave rise to a metaphorical use of *prōtōtokos* to express status and primacy ... he was before all creation in time and is above all creation in rank.”<sup>4</sup>

**HEAD OF THE CHURCH** In this passage, Paul moves from speaking of the Church as an individual assembly of believers in one place—the local church—to the Church Universal. So when he says Jesus is the Head of the Church, he means the whole body of Christ. “The *ekklēsia* is no longer, as is typical in the NT usage of the word elsewhere, the local gathering of believers. It is a worldwide entity, embracing all who acknowledge Christ as Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

**CREATION → REDEMPTION** “The one through whom the divine work of redemption has been accomplished is the one through whom the divine act of creation took place in the beginning. His mediatorial relation to the created universe provides a setting to the gospel of salvation which helps his people to appreciate that gospel the more.”<sup>6</sup>

**RECONCILIATION** “The reconciliatory means was Christ’s fleshly body, the reconciliatory goal was the Colossians’ right standing before God.” Because of all that God has done, Paul urges the Colossians to stay rooted in the Gospel in verse 23. For Paul, assurance and perseverance were two sides of the same coin. “Assurance of salvation and perseverance in salvation go hand in hand... spiritual fidelity and eternal security were [close] partners for Paul.”<sup>7</sup>

#### ENDNOTES:

1. C.S. Lewis, *The Joyful Christian* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1977), 118-120.
2. N.T. Wright, “Look at Jesus” - video interview in response to the question, “At your bedside, what would you want your kids to know about Jesus?” - <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/look-at-jesus>
3. Douglas J. Moo, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 119.
4. Longman & Garland, *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Ephesians - Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 290.
5. Douglas J. Moo, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 92.
6. F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 62-63.
7. Longman & Garland, *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Ephesians - Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 297.