

# MATURE

## Attending Church Weekly



Welcome to our second set of weekly bible reading notes to accompany our MATURE series. Our aim with these notes is to encourage one another to read God's word, so you may want commit with a friend to do these bible readings and to pray each day – and then ask each other how you've got on during the week – as Hebrews 10:24 says, *lets spur each other on.*

*These notes should hopefully be useful for individuals and for families with and without children. Each day, there is a bible passage to read – **read that first**, and **pray** - ask God to help you understand it. (If it is your habit to spend some time with the passage and make your own notes, then do that now.)*

*Once you're read the passage and thought about it – have a look at the accompanying notes. The notes cover some of the context of the passage, an explanation and an application. There are also some accompanying questions or suggestions for action. As God speaks to you through his word, you may wish to write down what he is calling you to do (and share it with someone!) However, don't worry if sometimes you don't receive an obvious answer to prayer or clear instruction – just keep faithfully reading God's word, and He will use it in your life, as the*

*Holy Spirit works in you.*

*After you've looked at the bible passage is a good time to pray – pray for strength to do what you need to do – thank God for what you have learned about him – and bring your requests before him.*

Then, you'll see that there is an activity for families with children; the target age range of these activities is 4-11ish, so you may need to modify them. This activity draws on one or two of the verses you've been reading, and give you some suggestions for sharing them with the family – over the breakfast or tea table perhaps. There's a starter activity to get people thinking, then reading the passage, some questions to answer, and then something to read – and a prayer so you don't forget to pray (just a starting point – do pray for longer if you can). Should take about five minutes – but can easily expand if you want it to.

Don't worry about communicating everything – particularly if you've got small children – communicating something of the good news of Jesus Christ every day is a great place to begin.

Enjoy – and let me know how you get on

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'James'.





## Monday

### Colossians 1:15-20 Christ and His Church

#### Read: Colossians 1:15-20

For the next three days, we're going to spend a little time looking at part of the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians, as we look at the relationship between Christ and his church.

Colossians is one of Paul's later letters, written to a church which was having some trouble seeing that Christ is sovereign over everything – that Jesus is in charge of everything. Paul writes to reassure them – and, of course, to challenge them.

So far in chapter 1, Paul has given thanks for the faith of the Colossians, and reminded them of how God has rescued them from darkness, and brought them into the light – another way of talking about salvation. Here in verse 15, Paul begins to talk about who Jesus is.

Look what he says about Jesus: he is the image of God – he reveals God to us (v15). He is the firstborn over creation (v15) – this isn't saying that Christ is created, but that just like the firstborn of a royal family, he inherits everything. As verses 16 and 17 say – everything was created by him and for him, and all things keep going because of him.

And then into the middle of this amazing picture of who Jesus is, comes the church. Look at verse 18 – Christ is the head of the body, the church – the one who rose from the dead. He is the one who came from God (v19) and who died on the cross for our sins – notice also in verse 20 how Christ's death on the cross isn't just about us – it's also about the whole universe being reconciled to God.

This tells us two things we need to know about the church. First of all, the church – as a whole, that is all Christians everywhere through all of time – is under Christ – he is the head. So much of our wrong thinking

over the years as Christians has come when we're put the church over Christ. No. Christ is the head of the church. Secondly, Christ has a plan for his church – and we are part of that amazing plan. Church isn't just something we do on Sundays – we're part of God's plan to reconcile everything to himself in Christ.

*So today:*

*Give thanks to God for what he has done in Christ*

*Ask God to help us to always see Christ as our head*

*Give thanks to God for what he is going to do in Christ*

#### Activity for families with Children

**Starter:** get a set of smallish objects, some of which are 'natural' and some of which are 'man-made' – a leaf, a pencil, a pencil sharpener etc. Take some time to talk about them – and ask who made them.

#### Read Colossians 1:16-17

Is there anything that Christ didn't make?

What does it mean that everything holds together in Christ? (For older children)

**Read:** The Bible tells us that everything was created by God – and that means God the Father, God the Son – Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It also tells us that the world only keeps going because God keeps it going. Stop for a moment some time today and thank God that he keeps our world going.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus we thank you that you made us, and that you keep us going minute by minute.

Amen.



## Weekend

### Hebrews 10:19-25 Keep on Coming

#### Read Hebrews 10:19-25

Finally this week, we're going to remind ourselves of one of the passages we looked at last Sunday morning.

This passage from Hebrews 10 comes at the end of a long section where the author of Hebrews has been outlining what Christ has done, particularly in being the one who made a sacrifice for sins, once for all, and in being that sacrifice.

Here we see that that Jesus is the one who has died for us – he has shed his blood – and his death has opened the way to God – to the most holy place. Jesus is a new kind of curtain – not the old curtain which separated the holy of holies from the rest of the tabernacle or temple complex, a curtain which the high priest could only pass through once per year, but a curtain which allows access. Jesus died for us, and has opened the way to God

And so we *Draw near to God* (v22) – we remember what Christ has done – and therefore to come before God as forgiven sinners – who have been washed clean by Christ's blood. What does this mean? It means that whatever our situation, however sinful we feel, we can always come before God in repentance, having confidence not in our selves but in Christ. In fact – we should always draw near.

Then we *Stay faithful* (v23). The Hebrews were facing some opposition for their faith. We too must hold onto the truth, because we know that Christ is faithful. We hold onto our rock and to his word, because we know he will not fail us, and *however things appear*, he is to be trusted.

Finally, we *Encourage one another together* (v24-5) We encourage one another to stand firm, to hold on, to confess – and to love Christ and one another more, and to do the good things that God has called us to do – and we meet together – all of us – so that we can do

the encouraging we need to do, and help one another draw near to God, stay faithful and do good deeds. And all this we do as we await the day – the day of the Lord's return.

*So today – ask yourself:*

*Am I standing firm and drawing near to God in Christ Jesus?*

*Am I doing this with my fellow believers – helping and being helped by them?*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** do the children's action rhyme 'here is the church' – again.

*Here is the church - Here is the steeple - Open the doors - Here are all the people*

Talk about why the people get together

#### Read Hebrews 10:24-5

What are we to do together?

What are we waiting for?

**Read:** when we get together on Sundays we get together to encourage and help one another – as we wait for Jesus Christ to return.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, help me to encourage other people when I go to church

Amen.



Friday

## Acts 2:42-27 What do we do on Sundays?

**Read: Acts 2:42-47**

Over the next two days we're going to look at a couple of passages which help us think about what we are doing when we gather together on a Sunday.

What do we do on Sundays? Look at what the early church did. They heard God's word – and obeyed it (v42), they devoted themselves to each other (v42), they broke bread together – not the same as having communion, but certainly the forerunner of it (v42) and they prayed (v42). They cared for each other with their possessions (v44-45). They met daily – because they wanted to share fellowship so much. (v46) They praised God – and God saved people (v47).

Prayer, preaching, praise, fellowship and the sacraments (baptism and communion) – these are marks of what happens in a church when the church is doing what God wants it to do.

We pray together – we do this every Sunday – we spend time bringing before God publicly the needs of the world – and we praise him.

We hear God's word. Right at the centre of our time together is the public reading and proclamation of scripture – we all need to hear from God, and God speaks to us together, as a people – so that we can encourage one another in discipleship.

We praise God – in what we say, in what we pray, in what we sing – and in how we act.

We enjoy fellowship together – yes over tea and biscuits – but also during the service as we praised God and hear from his word – together.

And we celebrate the sacraments – we baptise children of believers and those who come to faith as adults and have not already

been baptised, as a sign of what God has done in Christ – washing our sins away by his blood. We celebrate the Lord's supper regularly – so that we will not forget what Christ has done on the cross – and so we can gain the spiritual benefit of sharing bread and wine as Christ commanded.

*So today – ask yourself:*

*Is there something we do at church which I don't like – if so – what am I going to do about it?*

*Is there an activity at church which I think is more important than the other? Is it?*

### Activity for Families with Children

Starter: do the children's action rhyme 'here is the church':

*Here is the church - Here is the steeple - Open the doors - Here are all the people*

Talk about how church isn't the building – but the people inside.

### Read Acts 2:42

What should believers do?

Do we do all these things?

**Read:** when we get together on Sundays at church we pray, we hear from the bible, we get together with friends and we have special things like baptism and the Lord's Supper.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, help me to enjoy getting together with your people Amen.



Tuesday

## Colossians 1:21-23 Christ and His People

**Read: Colossians 1:21-23**

Today we're carrying on looking at Colossians 1 – from where we left of yesterday. Then, we were looking at this description of who Jesus is and what he has done – and saw how he is head of the church, and how the church is part of God's plan. Today, we're looking a little more about how we have become God's people.

Look at verse 21. Paul tells us that once we were God's enemies. He doesn't say once we were neutral towards God – in the way I might be towards someone I don't know and have never met. No – he says we were God's enemies - we hated God, and this hatred affected all of us – it was in our minds, and shown in our evil behaviour.

But Jesus Christ changed all that. Whilst we were still enemies, he died for us on the cross, and has washed us clean – so that no we are unblemished – no longer marked by our sin and rebellion against God.

And so, verse 23, we need to hold firm to this faith – we need to keep going, and keep trusting in Christ for salvation. We don't add to God's word by trying to earn our salvation, and we don't take away from God's word – we stick close to the gospel which we have heard and which has been proclaimed.

Stop for a minute and reflect on what Christ had done! Once we were enemies – now we are friends. Once we opposed God – now we are to do his will. This is the gospel – this is the good news.

Let's keep hold of it – and never let it go. Let's not dilute it by adding things, or making it dry out and wither by not seeking to continue in our faith. WE are Christ's people – let's live as Christ's people, seeking to be obedient to his word.

*So today:*

*Give thanks to God for sending Jesus to die for us on the cross.*

*Pray that we would hold firm to the faith that we have*

*Say sorry to God for those ways we have added to or taken away from God's word*

### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** place a coin on one side of the table. Ask your children to get it to the other side of the table without touching it. (It should be impossible). Then – ask 'can the coin get to the other side without you moving it?' (no) – then pick the coin up and move it yourself! (the coin can move without you children moving it...)

### Read Colossians 1:21-22

What were we once?

What are we now?

How did this happen?

**Read:** The Bible tells us that once we were enemies of God – like being on one side of the table. But Christ died for us and has made us God's friends – he has moved us to the other side of the table – we couldn't have done it on our own.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord God, we thank you that you sent Jesus to save us, and that he has made us your friends.

Amen.



## Wednesday

### Colossians 1:24-29 God's Amazing Purpose

**Read: Colossians 1:24-29**

Today we come to our last section of Colossians 1. We're looking at verses 24 to 29, to see why Paul labours for the church.

Paul begins in verse 24 by talking about filling up Christ's sufferings, for the sake of the church. This verse has tripped a few people up over the years – it's a reference to the sufferings all Christians experience as we wait for Christ's return. Then in verse 25, Paul describes himself as a servant of the church, presenting the word of God in all its fullness.

And look at what this fullness is – the mystery that has been revealed – and what is this amazing mystery? That God has made known his salvation to the Gentiles – to non-Jews. Salvation isn't just for those who were God's people in the Old Testament – it is for people of all nations.

And this is what Paul proclaims in verses 28 to 29 – so that everyone would be presented perfect – presented mature before Christ on the last day when Christ returns.

Paul has good news to proclaim. Now when we think of the good news of the gospel, we often think of individual salvation – what Christ has done for us on the cross – and there is nothing wrong in that. However, Paul wants us to have a wider picture as well – to see that the good news isn't just for us, but is for the whole world – for the Gentiles.

And so Paul laboured to share this good news – and so should we. We labour in our own communities, and we support others who labour elsewhere – perhaps one day even joining them – as God's amazing purpose to bring people to himself is revealed around the globe.

*So today:*

*Give thanks to God for sending Jesus to die for us on the cross for Jews and Gentiles*

*Pray that we would desire to share the good news with others*

*Pray that we would be ready to face those sufferings which come because we follow Christ*

**Activity for Families with Children**

**Starter:** talk about all the different ways we can communicate with other people, and listen to them. (Talking, telephone, text, email, letters, books etc.)

What do we have to do to tell someone something? (make the effort to speak / write it down)

**Read Colossians 1:28**

Who does Paul teach about?

Why does Paul teach about Christ?

**Read:** Paul wanted everyone to know that Jesus Christ had died for his people – and he wanted everyone to believe in Jesus and become part of his people. He went all over the place telling people about Jesus. We too can tell people about Jesus Christ – and how he died on the cross for us.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord God, we thank you that we can freely tell people the good news of Jesus. Help us to be bold in telling people about him.



## Thursday

### 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3 Being the Church

**Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3**

Today we're coming to 1 Thessalonians, one of Paul's earliest letters, to see what he thinks is important in a church – we're looking at his thanksgiving for the Thessalonians, to see what he thinks is vital and worth giving thanks for.

Paul writes to the church with Silas and Timothy, and offers them grace and peace – from God. Then he goes on to give thanks for them. He gives thanks for them continually – in his prayers.

And what does he give thanks for? (v3)– he gives thanks for their faith, and the good works that come from it. He gives thanks for their love – and how it works itself out in labour for others. He gives thanks for their hope in the Lord Jesus – which brings endurance.

Paul gives thanks for their faith, hope and love – and how that works out in practical activity. He gives thanks for what they have – and gives thanks for what they do.

We get a glimpse here of a church which is working – it's not perfect, but the Thessalonians are doing many of the things that God wants them to do.. They are caring for one another, they are working for the Lord, they are enduring sufferings and persecutions as they look forward to the future – and they can do all this because of their sure and certain faith and hope in Jesus Christ – who first loved them.

We should take their example to heart, and ask ourselves – about our faith hope and love

*So today – ask yourself:*

*Do I have the kind of hope that will endure?*

*Do I desire to love my brothers and sisters – and am I showing my love in practical ways?*

*Do I have faith in Jesus Christ?*

**Activity for Families with Children**

**Starter:** make six cards marked faith, hope, love, endurance, work, labour. Ask your children to put them in some kind of order – what do they think is most important? Least important?

In 1 Thessalonians Paul talks about these six things

**Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3**

What does Paul give thanks for?

What does faith lead to?

What does love lead to?

What does hope lead to?

*(use the six cards to lay this out on the table)*

**Read:** Paul gives thanks that the Thessalonians have faith, hope and love – and that because they have these things, they are doing something – what Christ has given them makes a difference to how they live

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus we thank you that you first loved us and give us faith and hope. Help us to do the work you have given us to do