



GLORIOUS RICHES

Daily Bible Readings			
M	May 27	Isa. 43:8-13	God’s Witnesses
T	May 28	Ps. 113	Praise the Lord!
W	May 29	Gal. 3:19-29	God’s Children in Christ through Faith
Th	May 30	Prov. 10:19-25	The Lord’s Blessing Makes Rich
F	May 31	Matt. 6:19-24	Your Treasure Is with Your Heart
Sa	June 1	Matt. 6:25-34	Seek First God’s Kingdom

MAIN IDEA

In the face of suffering, how might hope be restored? Paul rejoices in suffering for the faith as he shares the mystery of the gospel with Gentiles, which affirms Christ in them, the hope of glory.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:19-2:5

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:2-3)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Reflect on lesson 1, “Glorious Riches” (Participant’s Book, p. 1).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of the Scripture by reviewing the information the author of the Participant’s Book includes in the section “Colossae and Philosophy” (p. 2).
- Provide Bibles, Participant’s Books, Worship Leaflets for lesson 1, name tags, paper, and pens.
- On newsprint or a board, print the following open-ended prompt: “A situation where I experience hope these days is . . .”
- Obtain a white pillar candle to serve as the Christ candle, as well as a means to light it.
- Today’s hymn is stanza 5 of the hymn “I Bind unto Myself This Day.” If you have multiple copies of the hymnal *Glory to God*, you may choose to sing “Hope of the World” (*GtG*, #734) instead.
- If you plan to use the optional Scripture reading activity, recruit a strong reader in advance.

- A map of the Near East in New Testament times would be useful for this unit. Some churches have large copies of such maps, or you can refer participants to one online.
- As in past quarters, the lessons in this quarter suggest that participants respond in a journal. If possible, contact participants in advance and suggest that they bring a tablet or a paper journal. Provide writing paper for those who do not bring one.
- Step 6 offers additional options from which to choose.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Greet participants and provide name tags. When most have arrived, invite volunteers to respond to the open-ended prompt. Invite any newcomers to introduce themselves. Then ask: “What causes you to feel hopeless? Why?”
- In this first unit, participants will explore hope through the lens of those whose faith in Christ gave shape to the early church.
- Distribute Bibles, Participant’s Books, Worship Leaflets, pens, and paper for lesson 1.
- Formulate and get consensus on some simple ground rules for the study (for example, welcoming diverse points of view, maintaining confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Light the candle, noting that it is a reminder of Jesus Christ, the light of the world.
- Encourage participants to settle into silence.
- Invite volunteers to lead portions of Morning Prayer from the Worship Leaflet, beginning with the Opening Sentences and ending after the Hymn.

Teaching Tip
<p>Even if your group of participants has been meeting for some time and membership has remained pretty much the same from quarter to quarter, you may find a newcomer or two showing up for a new study. Be prepared by providing name tags and planning to use the introductory activity. Even if you find only familiar faces present in this first lesson, you can always learn more about each other by using the open-ended prompt.</p>

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:24–2:3

1:24 I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. ²⁵I became its minister according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. ²⁷To them God chose to make known how great among the gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹For this I toil and strive with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

2:1 For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you and for those in Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face. ²I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 2

- Ask the group to read aloud in unison the portion of the background scripture (plus four additional verses) that precedes the passage, which is called the Christ hymn, Colossians 1:15–20. Then read the remainder of the passage round-robin style, with each participant reading one verse in turn.
- Optional: As has been noted in previous studies, epistles in the first century directed to a community of faith would have been read aloud to the gathered community. Invite participants to imagine being part of the church at Colossae to whom this epistle is directed. Point out that Paul was not known to this church, as it was started by Epaphras, whom Paul commends. Have the reader you recruited read the Scripture passage aloud.

4. Colossae and Philosophy

Participant's Book, p. 2

- If possible, point participants to the location of Colossae on a map. Invite volunteers to lift up relevant facts about the situation of the people in the Colossian church.
- The author of the study notes that even a casual reading of Colossians indicates that the church members there must have been rather intellectually sophisticated. Discuss:

1. What issues of interest to the people there does the author cite as evidence of this?
2. What is *gnosticism*? What vocabulary does Paul use that points to this?
3. What aspects of current intellectual thinking today do you think are obscuring what it really means to believe in Jesus Christ?

5. Cosmic Search Participant's Book, p. 3

- The author notes that questions about our origin and the nature of the universe in which we live tantalize and mystify us. In Colossians, Paul deals with possible answers that are drawing the attention of his readers. Invite volunteers to name some interpretations of the cosmos that were intellectually available to the Colossian Christians but incompatible with the truth about Jesus Christ.
- We read that, in chapter 1:15–23, Paul counters these explanations. How?
- Refer participants to Scripture Notes 3, 4, and 5, where we read that, for Paul, suffering is never endured without hope. Paul tells the Colossians that the mysteries of God become known to them as their hope in Christ transforms their lives. Ask:
 1. How does Paul describe hope, and where is it revealed?
 2. How do you respond to the idea that hope is universal and communal?

6. Stepping into the World Participant's Book, p. 4

- The author observes that our methods of exploring the universe are quite different from those of the Colossians, and that we are able to search things visible and invisible in ways that were unimagined just a few years ago. Yet despite our greater understanding of the cosmos, suffering still persists and hope sometimes seems dim. Invite participants to reflect on the following and to respond to one or more in their journals:
 1. Considering the fact that many of the issues that plagued first-century Christians still stubbornly persist, what issue evokes the biggest sense of hopelessness in me? Where do I find hope?
 2. How do I respond to the statement that the mysteries of God become known to me as my hope in Christ transforms my life? In what ways has this been my experience?
- Choose between the following optional activities for exploring the Scripture:
 1. Invite participants to list any signs of hope they see in our world today, as well as places or situations where hope is desperately needed.

2. Discuss how we find hope in suffering without glorifying the suffering. How do we avoid making an *idol* of suffering?
3. Verse 27 talks about the mystery of Christ in you. What does it mean to have Christ in you? What does Christ's suffering have to do with our own?

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet, and enlist volunteers to lead the remaining portions of Morning Prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, pray the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Bless participants as they leave, saying, "(Name), go forth with the assurance of Christ within you: comforted, restored, and grounded in hope."
- Extinguish the candle.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture.

1. While Paul elsewhere speaks of believers participating in the suffering of Christ (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 1:5–7), here he speaks of his own suffering as "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1:24). This has posed theological questions: Was not Christ's suffering complete? How could Paul's suffering complete it?
2. One plausible explanation is that the phrase "the afflictions of Christ" does not refer to Jesus' suffering on the cross but is equivalent to the Jewish apocalyptic concept of "the woes of the Messiah," according to which great suffering would attend the last days in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah (see Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8). Paul sees his present suffering within this framework.
3. For Paul, suffering is never endured without hope. In this case, it is an element of his servanthood, through which Christ, "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), is revealed in those to whom he ministers.
4. Paul's hope is universal. This is indicated in Colossians 1:28, where Paul uses the word *everyone* three times: "It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ."
5. This hope is also communal. Paul indicates that his sufferings are "for the sake of his [Christ's] body, that is, the church" (v. 24) and he encourages those for whom he struggles to be "united in love" (2:2).

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Suggesting that participants revisit the open-ended prompts from the lesson's beginning, reflecting on the situations that seem hopeless. In what ways might God be calling them to act?
2. Encouraging them to seek out glimpses of hope, even in the face of difficult situations.