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## READY

Pray & Inform

March-April Associational ReConnect Road Trip

## SET

Prepare & Equip

Spring New Groups Bible Study Lesson  
Summer Enlist & Equip New Leaders  
August Regional ReConnect Sunday School Clinics

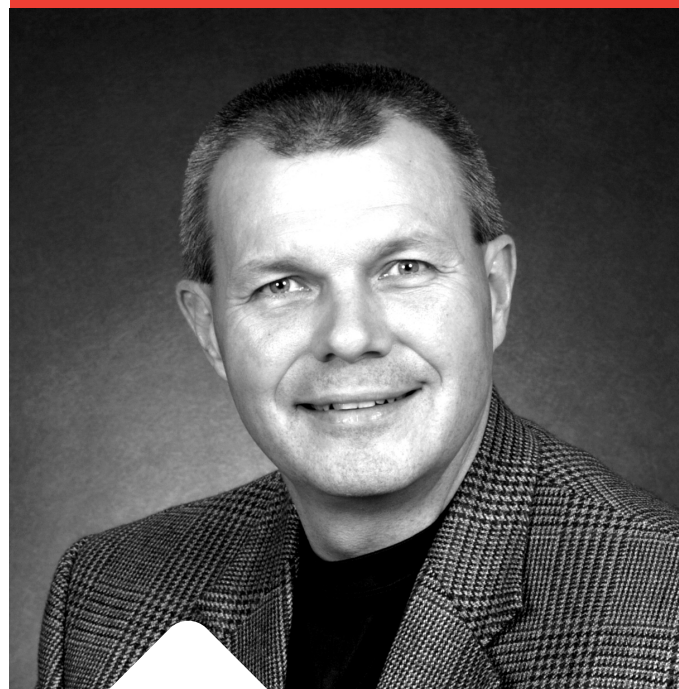
## START!!

September 7 New Groups Start in Oklahoma Churches  
October 5 Soulwinning Commitment Day  
November 2 Connection Day – Invite a friend to Sunday School  
November 2-9 Follow Up Week

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This ministry is made possible by Oklahoma Baptists  
gifts through the Cooperative Program



## ABOUT THE WRITER

G. Dwayne McCrary works for LifeWay leading various teams that create adult Bible study resources. He also teaches a Sunday School class and is an adjunct professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dwayne has 20-plus years of church staff experience and is an experienced writer and conference leader. He is married to Lisa, who serves as the director of Preschool Ministries in their church. They have two grown children and will become grandparents in the summer of 2014.

## > THE GOAL

## COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

The goal of this study is to help participants understand the biblical value of small groups and the need for the church to create new groups.

## > USING THIS GUIDE

This guide was created to help you lead a Sunday School class or other small Bible study group in examining the value of and characteristics of a healthy small Bible study group. This Leader Guide includes Bible commentary and ideas for leading the group Bible study time. A handout has also been developed for use by the group during and after the study time (referred to as the Learner Handout).

### Actions to take prior to the group study time

1. Secure copies of the Learner Handout.

2. Contact the members of your Bible study group to let them know your group will be studying this special lesson. Encourage them to spend time prior to the group time reading and reflecting on Colossians 3:12-17.

*If you use social media, you may want to send a text or message similar to the following: We'll have a special lesson this week from Colossians 3:12-17 that will help us be a better group...see you there!*

3. Study Colossians 3:12-17 using your Bible and the material provided in this Leader Guide.

4. Plan the group time using Ideas for Leading Your Group Time provided in this Leader Guide.

5. Gather resources needed to lead the group time.

6. Arrive early, making sure you are the first person in your group to arrive. Greet each member of the group as they arrive.

7. Lead the group time using the plan you created, adjusting as you go.

8. After the group time, contact group members who were not able to attend, sharing with them a summary of the things the group discovered. Begin to take the steps you and the group identified at the end of the group time that will improve the health of your group. Begin to pray about starting, assisting, or sponsoring a new small Bible study group.

*\*All Bible text used in this Leader Guide are from the King James Version. The Learner Handout was developed without printed Bible text so you can use the translation you prefer to lead the group time.*

## ➤ *FOR YOUR PERSONAL STUDY*

We need each other. It is that plain and simple. Life is not easy. It is confusing, complex, and full of all kinds of unplanned twists. Even the good twists can be just as unsettling as the bad ones. Life is much more manageable when we have others walking beside us on the journey. Those who think they do not need anyone else to make it in this life are only fooling themselves, and to be honest, they are only cheating themselves out of the joys of true friendship.

God created us to relate to each other. He also created us to rely on each other in this life. The writer of Ecclesiastes put it this way: “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.” (Eccl. 4:9-10).

Who do you count on when things get tough? How would you describe their value to you?

God has given us a great gift in the form of small groups within a local church. A small group studies together, sharpens and encourages each other, and does life together. It is needed by believers and craved by the unbeliever...even if he or she refuses to admit it. The care exhibited between the members of a small group is the very thing that attracts the unbeliever to Christ. Through this love, people come to know the truth of Jesus (see John 17:23).

In Colossians 3, we discover the value of a small group and how that group is to serve its members. As we examine this section of Paul's letter, look for the actions believers are called upon to take. Pay particular attention to the actions that can only be done in a group...a small group.

## ➤ *GETTING THE BACKSTORY*

Paul had not met the people to whom he was writing (see 2:1). Epaphras, a coworker of Paul, had been used by God to establish a church in Colossae (see 1:7; 4:12,13). The coworker had reported to Paul the progress of the congregation in Colossae and the issues facing this group of believers.

Colossae sat near Laodicea and Hierapolis, located on the trade route between Ephesus and the Euphrates. As a result, the city was a melting pot, influenced by Roman, Jewish, and Eastern thought. Most of the believers in this city were Gentiles (see 1:21-22; 3:11). It would stand to reason that the multiple influences in the city would make their way into this relatively new church. One can see how a city with so many cultures present could borrow from the beliefs of each culture to create its own unique religion. In addressing these believers, Paul referenced philosophies, legalistic religious practices, and the worship of angels (2:8,15). No one knows for sure the issue specifically being

addressed by Paul, but at the core was the issue of Jesus being fully divine and fully human. Paul clearly presented Jesus as God's Son who had a real body and died a real death on a real cross. Having established this fact (see chapters 1 and 2), Paul then turned his attention to how they were to live in light of the truth of Jesus.

Having defined the things that should no longer be a part of the life of the believer (Col. 3:1-11), Paul then identified what should be seen in the believer's life and how these attitudes were to be fostered.

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## ***COLOSSIANS 3:12-17***

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*<sup>12</sup>Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; <sup>13</sup>Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. <sup>14</sup>And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. <sup>17</sup>And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

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## ➤ **DEFINING KEY WORDS AND PHRASES**

**PUT ON:** continuation of theme found in 3:5-11, actions to put off and to put on compared to the removal of dirty clothes and the wearing of clean clothes

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**THE ELECT OF GOD, HOLY AND BELOVED:** used to describe Israel as God's special possession (Ex. 19:6; Deut. 7:6-9). Paul was writing mostly to Gentile Christians, reassuring them of their position in Christ

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**BOWELS OF MERCIES:** deep feelings for the needs and hurts of others, mostly seen in how Christ showed compassion to all people while on earth

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**KINDNESS:** a helpful and friendly attitude expressed toward others by seeking to meet their needs

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**HUMBLENESS OF MIND:** was viewed as a weakness in Greek thought, but Christ defined it as a strength (Matt. 11:29), an attitude of placing the needs of others above your own

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**MEEKNESS:** obedient submission to God, expressed in patiently responding to others

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**LONGSUFFERING:** tolerating or choosing to overlook behavior in others that irritates or aggravates

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**FORBEARING ONE ANOTHER:** carries the idea of bearing with or putting up with someone, infers that we are to continually have this attitude

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**FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER:** being gracious enough to pardon offenses, infers continually having this attitude

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**A QUARREL AGAINST ANY:** infers that the party being offended is to take the initiative to repair the relationship

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**AS CHRIST FORGAVE YOU, SO ALSO DO YE:** see Luke 23:34; Jesus forgave those who persecuted and crucified Him

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**CHARITY:** agape, God's unconditional love for us and the kind of love we are to have for Him and for others

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**BOND OF PERFECTNESS:** that which holds something together, the belt that held the other garments in place

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**PEACE OF GOD RULE IN YOUR HEARTS:** word translated rule originally referred to

the umpire of an athletic event that presided over the games and presented the awards, came to mean the judge

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**WHICH ALSO YE ARE CALLED IN ONE BODY:** reference to an invitation to a meal or a summons to court, infers that Jesus invited others to trust in Him and become a part of His body

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**BE YE THANKFUL:** grateful attitude seen in outward expression

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**THE WORD OF CHRIST:** the whole truth related to Jesus' identity, death, and resurrection, and His redemptive work

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**DWELL IN YOU RICHLY:** Christ is to be the center of one's life and the life of the group; inhabiting and influencing every area of life

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**IN ALL WISDOM:** the application of knowledge

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**TEACHING:** the orderly arrangement of content and its effective communication, usually abstract or theological

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**ADMONISHING:** strong encouragement, practical and moral in nature

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**ONE ANOTHER:** mutual involvement in each other's lives

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**ALL WISDOM:** the use of knowledge in the appropriate way

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**SINGING PSALMS:** songs similar to those found in the Book of Psalms

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**HYMNS:** general term for songs of praise to God

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**SPIRITUAL SONGS:** songs with lyrics of spiritual focus

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**GRACE IN YOUR HEARTS TO THE LORD:** carrying an attitude that recognizes God's gracious actions toward us

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**WHATSOEVER YE DO IN WORD OR DEED, DO ALL:** encompasses the whole of one's life

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**GIVING THANKS TO GOD AND THE FATHER BY HIM:** a reoccurring theme in this passage, points to the motivation behind the actions and attitudes identified by Paul

## ➤ FOR OUR LESSON

### ➤ OUR NEW IDENTITY (COL. 3:12A)

In verse 11, Paul listed a variety of groups in opposition to each other (e.g.: Greek/Jew, circumcised/uncircumcised). Each of these categories represented tags used to divide people. If one could classify a person as an opposite, then he or she could easily dismiss their needs and worth. These had been the distinctions the Colossian believers had grown to accept. Paul redefined the distinction between people as Christians or non-Christians. This is the only designation that really mattered in Paul's view.

The terms Paul used to describe believers were significant. These terms were used to describe Israel as God's chosen people. Here Paul used the term to include Gentiles who were believers. If there was any doubt in the minds of the Colossian believers that they had a place in the Kingdom of Christ, Paul removed it with the use of this term. Heritage, race, and social status are irrelevant when it comes to the Kingdom. The issue is accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord. Trusting in Him and Him alone determines a person's relationship with God. The same concept was expressed by Paul in his letter to the church at Ephesus when he reminded them that they had been aliens prior to their salvation, but were now citizens in God's household (see Eph. 2:19).

### ➤ DEMONSTRATED CHARACTER (COL. 3:12B-13)

We have all met people who were obviously from the same family. They had the same walk, the same way of mispronouncing a word, or the same mannerism when they spoke. I grew up around a family that included five brothers. All five of them walked favoring their left side. They did not do it when they ran, only when they walked. In time, I discovered that their dad had an artificial leg causing him to favor his left side when walking. There was nothing wrong with the legs of the sons; they simply emulated the walk of their father.

Paul identified actions that were no longer to be named among the Colossian believers in verses 5 through 9. Paul now identified the characteristics that would counter the things they once did.

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*Identify the attributes Paul called for the Colossian believers to put on in Colossians 3:12b,13.*

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*Use the Key Words and Phrases to write an expanded version of verses 12b-13.*

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The attributes in these verses were related to the things Paul called for the believers to put off in verses 3:4-11. For example, Paul listed anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech as things that should be removed. In verse 13, he called for them to put on forgiveness. It would be almost impossible to be a slanderer when you are also trying to be forgiving.



*How are the attitudes in verses 12-13 related to the actions Paul called for the believers to put off in verses 4-11?*

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This change outlined by Paul comes about only through the power of Christ. These attitudes were fostered by an understanding of who Jesus was and what He had done for them. When talking about forgiving other believers, Paul reminded the Colossian believers of the forgiveness they found in Christ. Christ did not wait on us to approach Him for our salvation. He demonstrated His love to us while we were still in rebellion (Rom. 5:8). We were the ones offending, and He took the initiative to offer us forgiveness through His death. Paul was calling on the believers of Colossae to demonstrate the character of Christ. Christlike character is not something we pursue, but rather it is something we possess because of whose child we are. We sin because we are sinners, and we forgive because we are forgiven.

### ➤ **DONE IN COMMUNITY (COL. 3:14-17)**

Matthew Henry viewed the actions described in verses 14 -17 as the things needed to carry out the attitudes in the previous verses. The first of these actions is putting on love (v. 14). Love binds everything else together, serving as the motivator for the way we treat other believers and potential believers. (That is a simple way of saying everyone we encounter who is not a believer but could be). When asked about the greatest commandments, Jesus pointed to loving God and loving others (Matt 22:37-40). As God works through us, we become instruments of His love. This love talked about by Paul also creates unity within the church. When we function in unity of purpose, we become an answer to Jesus' prayer as recorded in John 17:21.

The second action deals with submitting to God's rule in our lives and our churches. Jesus is the One who gives peace. He carries the title of Prince of Peace for a reason. We are separated from God due to our sin. Sin causes discord and strife within the deepest parts of our being. Only through faith in Jesus can we find peace and be whole as a person and with God.

This peace was to rule in the life of the believer and the church. The term used by Paul was plural, implying that each member of the local congregation was to be at peace. The congregation was to base its course of action on the peace of Christ. They would only act if the peace of Christ validated the action within the members of the congregation individually and as a whole. As such, they would function as one body. The false teachers were a threat in that they sought to divide the body. The peace of Christ would serve as a means of keeping the congregation together and on the right path in the present and in the future.

Thirdly, Paul called for the believers in Colossae to dwell on the Word. The congregation was to be always mindful of the gospel message and the implications of that message. Once again, this was to be a corporate activity. This corporate element is seen in the descriptive statements that follow highlighted by the phrases one another and the use of the plural pronoun you.

This dwelling was a function of the teaching and admonishing that was to take

place. Teaching usually involved the orderly arrangement of truths and the communication of those truths. The teaching was then usually reinforced as the group encouraged or admonished each other to put the truths they were discovering into practice. Teaching was usually thought of as something done by an individual. In this case, teaching was an action done by the group.

Paul explained that this teaching and admonishing was to be done through the use of songs. He identified various kinds of songs in the process. Think about how many of the songs we sing in worship that teach us a truth about God. This is nothing new. The Hebrews did it for years. The Psalms are songs used to teach us the truths of God. Psalm 1 calls us to righteousness. Psalm 2 tells of a coming King who is the Son of God. Psalm 3 tells of our need to trust God in all circumstances. Scan the Book of Psalms and look at the ones highlighted in your Bible. You will discover songs that teach about God, forgiveness, the promised Messiah, our sin, and God's grace. The songbook served as a curriculum for the Hebrews.

The end result would be lives that honored Jesus in every possible way. The way they cared for their families would honor Christ. The way they functioned as a body would honor Christ. The way they taught and encouraged each other would honor Christ. Nothing in their lives would be outside the sphere of honoring Christ.

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*Dwelling richly on the Word requires interaction. What does this tell us about the role a small Bible study group should carry?*

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*How do putting on love, submitting to Christ's rule, and dwelling on the Word work together?*

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*How are these actions carried out by your Bible study group?*

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*Do you think these actions are best done in a larger group or in a smaller group? Explain.*

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Paul ended this section in his letter by pointing back to the need for giving thanks to the Father. Of significance is the way Paul defined how we are to give thanks—through the Son. We go through Jesus to approach the Father. Jesus is the only path to the Father (John 14:10). There is no other way.

## ➤ **PULLING IT TOGETHER**

*Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

The actions listed by Paul could not be done alone. Teaching and admonishing

requires a group. These things are all done in community and done with mutual involvement in each other's lives. This kind of mutual involvement usually does not happen in a group of 100 or even 50 for that matter. It usually happens in a small group where trust can be built and questions can be asked openly. Jesus presented truth to lots of people, but He was only consistently involved in the lives of 12 men.

This kind of community that we call a Sunday School class or a small Bible study group is not for believers only. Jesus set the standard with His disciples. He created a group that He molded and shaped into world changers. When they first started meeting, the disciples were a far cry from being totally committed followers of Christ. Along the way, they began to understand who Christ was. One of them never got it, but Jesus still included Judas in the life of the group. In Luke 14, we find Jesus telling two parables about two banquets. The first parable told of a banquet that was missing the broken people in society. The second parable told of a banquet with plenty of room that was open to anyone who was willing to come. One has to wonder, if Jesus were telling the parable today, would He have used a Sunday School class or a small Bible study group as the setting instead of a banquet?

Over the years, I have kept a list of characteristics of a healthy Sunday School class or small Bible study group. The list has gone through many renditions in an effort to be concise, to define the truly important, and to avoid the redundant. Here are the 12 characteristics on that list today:

- **Requires someone's preparation to lead the group Bible study time**
- **Challenges all to participate in the group Bible study time**
- **Holds each other responsible for spiritual growth**
- **Seeks to include others not in a Bible study group**
- **Actively contacts group members and potential members**
- **Welcomes guests, treating them as valued people**
- **Seeks to discover needs so they can respond to them**
- **Incorporates everyone in the ministry of the group**
- **Builds relationship within the group (use fellowships if you cannot do it any other way)**
- **Develops and maintains a prayer ministry within the group**
- **Prepares others to do what they are currently doing (apprentices)**
- **Looks for ways of sending people out to start a new group, strengthen an existing group, or sponsor a new group**

As I said, this is my list. As you look at the list, identify the characteristics called for by Paul in Colossians 3.

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*Here is the big question: How well are you leading your class or group to do these things? What keeps your group from being this kind of group? What needs to happen for your group to become a Colossians 3 kind of group? Take some time to create a list of steps you need to take to lead your group to become this kind of group.*

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*What could your group do to help start a new group this year?*

## ➤ IDEAS FOR LEADING YOUR GROUP TIME

### ➤ FOCUS ATTENTION

As the group arrives, solicit responses to the quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Encourage them to rate their degree of agreement or disagreement on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being totally agree and 10 being totally disagree.

Option: As the group arrives, ask them to share the name of the person or persons they count on when things get tough. Invite them to share how they would describe the value of having such a friend.

Explain that during this special Bible study the group will be examining the value of being part of a small Bible study group. Challenge them to compare their thoughts about the role a group should play with the description given by Paul in Colossians 3:12-17.

### ➤ EXAMINE THE BIBLE TOGETHER

Briefly introduce the lesson by sharing an overview of the background behind the writing of Colossians (see Getting the Backstory). Emphasize that after Paul established the truth about Jesus, he turned his attention to how the Colossian believers were to live in light of the truth of Jesus.

#### OPTION

When introducing Colossae, refer to a map in a study Bible or secure a map from the Internet.

State: *Paul called on the Colossian believers to put aside actions associated with their former lives (see Col. 3:1-11). He then turned his attention to the attitudes they should exhibit.*

Read aloud Colossians 3:12a, calling for the group to listen carefully to how Paul addressed the Colossian believers.

Direct the group to read silently in their Bibles Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 7:6-9; and Ephesians 2:19.

Ask: *Why would Paul's use of this term have been important to the readers? What does the use of these phrases reveal about the Christian community?* Use information from Our New Identity and your personal study to clarify as needed. Help the group understand that Paul was communicating to the Colossian believers that they had a place in God's Kingdom.

Share the story about the five brothers under Demonstrate Character. Explain that, as believers, we are to emulate the character of Christ.

Provide paper or direct the group to use their copies of the Learner Handout. Direct the group to write an expanded translation of Colossians 3:12b-

13 in terms a fifth grader could understand. Provide a Bible dictionary and commentary or direct the group to use a Bible study app on their smartphone for assistance. Allow the group to take the lead in creating the expanded translation. Use the Defining Key Words and Phrases to assist as needed.

## OPTION

Place the group into teams of two. Direct each team to develop an expanded translation. After allowing time for them to work, invite volunteers to share their expanded definitions.

Briefly summarize the actions Paul called for the believers to put off in verses 3:4-11. Ask: How are the attitudes in these verses related to the actions Paul called for the believers to put off in verses 3:4-11?

*State: The challenge facing the Colossian believers was finding some type of mechanism that would help them put off and put on these things on an everyday basis. Matthew Henry asserted that the actions Paul described in verses 14-17 are the things needed to make verses 4-13 happen.*

Call for a volunteer to read aloud Colossians 3:14-17. As the volunteer reads, write the following on a markerboard or large sheet of paper: Put on Love, Submit to the Rule of Christ, Dwell Richly on the Word.

Present a minilecture using the content in the Leader Guide and your personal study to explain putting on love and submitting to the rule of Christ. Add notes to the markerboard next to the appropriate statements.

On the markerboard or a large sheet of paper, call attention to the phrase Dwell Richly on the Word. Lead the group to scan Colossians 3:16-17 and identify the actions Paul used to describe how to dwell richly on the Word. Use comments from the Leader Helps and your personal study to clarify words or phrases as needed. Suggest that the actions of teaching and admonishing were to lead to honoring God as a group.

Use information in the Leader Guide and from your personal study to explain the use of songs to teach and admonish. Point to the Psalms as examples of songs that teach and admonish.

## OPTION

Invite group members to identify their favorite Psalms. Encourage them to identify key doctrinal truths expressed in the Psalm(s) they identify.

*Ask: The actions connected to dwell richly on the Word require interaction; what does this interaction tell us about the role a small Bible study group should carry?*

Highlight the last statement in verse 17. Explain that Paul emphasized that we can only approach the Father through Jesus. Explain that Jesus declared that He was the only way to the Father (see John 14:6). Offer to make an appointment or remain after the class time for anyone in the group who wants to know more about becoming a follower of Christ.

Remind the group of the three actions you recorded on the markerboard or sheet of paper. Ask: *How are these things carried out by your Bible study group? Do you think these actions are best done in a larger group or a smaller group? Explain.*

## ➤ SUMMARIZE

Summarize by presenting the following points from the lesson and from Pulling It Together in the Leader Guide: All believers are part of God's people. Being a part of God's family implies a different lifestyle. This new lifestyle includes a new attitude built on the character of Christ with His love as the prominent feature. Believers are to instruct and encourage each other in the development of Christ's character in their lives and in their groups. These groups of instruction and encouragement are for both believers and non-believers. Invite the group to add insights they gained throughout this study. Record the insights on a marker board or large sheet of paper. Lead the group to list insights gained from today's lesson on the Learner Handout.

## ➤ TAKE ACTION

Call attention to Characteristics of a Healthy Small Bible Study Group on the Learner Handout. Give the group time to review the list, and invite them to add to or suggest deletions from the list. Be sure to ask for a rationale for adding or deleting an item on the list.

Lead the group in discussing how well the class or group does these things. Ask: *What keeps our group from being this kind of group? What needs to happen for our group to become this kind of group?*

Lead the group to list the steps that are essential in becoming the kind of group described in Colossians 3 and that carries the characteristics listed for a healthy group. Ask the group what they could do in the next six months to start a new group, or help the church begin a new group.

Close with prayer, asking God to help you lead the group and for the courage to take the steps identified to improve your current and any future small Bible study groups.









