First in Everything: Colossians 1:18-20

COLOSSIANS 1:18-20 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

The distance you feel from God didn't get closed by you climbing up to him. He came all the way down, bled on a Roman cross, and made the peace himself, and now the whole thing waits on you to just receive it.

Opening Lines

Blood is the language of violence. Every time you hear that word, something has gone wrong. So watch what Paul does with it here: he makes blood the currency of peace.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to see that the peace they keep trying to earn was already made at the cross, and that the crucified man is first over everything. If they leave still thinking they have to climb, the lesson didn't land.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the Stoic 'cosmos as a body' background if time is tight. It's fascinating, but the peace-through-blood point is the one they have to walk out with.
- Where the moment lives: It lives in the moment a person names a cold relationship out loud and admits the peace-making move is theirs to send. Not in admiring the theology of 'all the fullness.'
- Your prep: Sit with 'the firstborn from among the dead' and 'making peace through the blood' until you can say them without notes. If your own grief or a broken relationship comes up while you prep, that's not a distraction, that's your opening.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Classroom opening 'blood is violence' (4 min) → read 1:18-20 aloud twice (3 min) → teach 'fullness'/plērōma with the cupped-hands image (8 min) → questions 1-2 in the full room (10 min) → question 3 or 5 in pairs, then report back (12 min) → commitments around the room, you first (6 min) → spontaneous prayer over what was named (2 min). Transformation happens in the pairs and the commitment round. If short, cut the Stoic-cosmos background inside the 'fullness' teaching, not the commitment round.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening 'does God feel far off' (5 min) → read the passage, each person a phrase (4 min) → teach 'fullness' with hands (8 min) → questions 1-3 conversationally (18

min) → question 4 slow, let grief breathe (10 min) → question 5, the commitment question, names and a 'when' (10 min) → prayer over the specific things named (5 min). Transformation lives in questions 4 and 5. If short, trim question 2 — the ladders — since question 5 carries the weight.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening 'peace already made sounds too easy' (3 min) → read 1:20 out loud together (2 min) → say the 'fullness' idea plainly, God came all the way down, no ladder (6 min) → straight to question 1 and question 5 (12 min) → each of you names one message you'll send and when, you first (5 min) → short prayer for each other by name (2 min). Transformation is the named message. Nothing to cut at this length — protect the commitment moment above all.

Commitments, Not Summary

Here's a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately. Most lessons end with a summary: the teacher recaps the three points, everyone nods, coats go on. Nodding is not transformation. This week you will end not by summarizing but by asking each person to say out loud one specific thing they will DO before you meet again. Not 'I'll think about the church more.' Something with a name and a deadline: 'I'll text my brother Saturday.' 'I'll say one good word about my church at lunch Tuesday.' You go first so the bar is set. Write down what people say — you'll follow up. A summary asks the room to agree. A commitment asks the room to move. Drill the difference tonight.

Why This Passage Matters

Your people carry around a quiet math: God is up there, I am down here, and the gap is mine to close. So they climb — better behavior, more discipline, more church attendance, a running tally of whether they've done enough. It's exhausting, and it never ends, because the distance always feels a little wider than yesterday. Colossians 1:18-20 detonates that math. The teaching drifting into Colossae said God was too holy and too far to touch the material world directly, so you needed intermediaries, a ladder of lesser powers to bridge the gap. Paul answers flatly: all the fullness of God took up residence in one man, and that man bled on a cross to make peace with things on earth and things in heaven. Not from a distance. Not by wishing it. Made. When you teach this, you're not handing people a doctrine to admire. You're prying their fingers off a ladder they've been climbing their whole lives and turning them around to see that the One at the top already came all the way down to them. There are few things you'll ever get to say to a room that matter more. Get to say it plainly.

Catch the Fire First

Before you stand in front of anyone, do the central exercise yourself. Name one relationship of yours that has gone cold — a sibling, an old friend, someone at church you avoid. Write down the one sentence you've been not-sending. Then decide whether you'll

actually send it before you teach this lesson, or before you meet again. If you ask the room to send a peace-making message while you're still sitting on yours, they'll smell it. The peace Christ made is supposed to spill somewhere, and it should spill out of you first.

Bring Your Own Story

- A time you were exhausted from trying to climb your way close to God, and what it cost you.
- A relationship that went cold and the message you either sent or are still avoiding.
- A graveside or a loss where 'the firstborn from among the dead' was the only thing that held.
- SAMPLE — polished vs real: Polished: 'The Lord graciously restored a fractured relationship in my life.' Real: 'I didn't talk to my brother for three years, and one text I almost didn't send fixed it in ten minutes.'
- Guardrail: tell it real, not raw — a story you've made peace with, not a wound you're still bleeding from in front of the room.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Blood is the language of violence — it always means something has torn. So why does Paul reach for that exact word to describe how God made peace? Hold that tension. We'll see he chose it on purpose."

Start with a contradiction to create tension the text will resolve.

SMALL GROUP: "Be honest for a second: does God ever feel far off, like there's a distance you're supposed to close and never quite can? Keep that feeling in mind. Paul's about to tell us who actually closed it."

Open with a shared felt experience so the abstract lands personally.

COFFEE: "There's a line in Colossians that says the peace you're looking for was already made and is just waiting for you to take it. That sounds too easy. Let me show you why it isn't."

Lead with a plain, disarming claim you'll spend the time defending.

Teaching the Word

Teach the word 'fullness' — Greek plērōma. In Colossae the new teaching pictured God as thinned out on the way down: full up top, a little less in each lower power, barely a trace by the time you reach the material world. Divinity parceled out, watered down as it descends. Paul takes that picture and smashes it. Cup your hands like you're holding water, then slowly tip them and let it drain through your fingers — that's how their teaching imagined God reaching the world, arriving as a trickle. Now make a fist. Nothing lost, nothing leaking, all of it held. That's plērōma. 'God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him' — the entire completeness of God, nothing held back, nothing

delegated elsewhere, took up residence in the crucified man. Which means the blood on that cross was God's own. Sit with the line: the distance you feel from God was not closed by climbing. It was closed by his coming down. [Then let it be silent.]

Discussion Questions

1. Paul says peace was made 'through the blood of his cross.' Why blood? Why not just declare peace from a distance?

Coaching note: You want them to feel that peace cost something. Don't rush to comfort — let the strangeness of violence-becoming-peace sit before you resolve it.

If it stalls: Think of a real feud you've seen end. Did it end just because someone said 'let's be at peace,' or did someone have to give something up first?

2. The teaching in Colossae said you needed a ladder of intermediaries to reach a far-off God. What ladders do people climb today to feel close to God?

Coaching note: Let them name specifics — good behavior, church attendance, being useful. Write them on a board. These are the very things Paul's answer dismantles.

If it stalls: Finish this sentence for yourself: 'I feel close to God when I've _____.' What goes in that blank?

3. Christ is called 'the head of the body, the church.' How does it change the way you talk about your own church to remember it's a body Christ is the head of?

Coaching note: This ties to the take-home action about speaking well of the church instead of joining the complaining. Push gently — most people have a running critique ready. Ask for one honest good word instead.

If it stalls: Say one true good thing about your church out loud right now. Just one.

4. 'The firstborn from among the dead' — Christ walked out of the tomb ahead of everyone who trusts him. Where do you most need that to be true right now?

Coaching note: Grief will surface here. Slow down. Don't fix it, don't move on fast — let someone name a loss and let the room hold it.

If it stalls: Is there someone you've lost, or a fear about death, that this phrase touches? You don't have to say who.

5. If the peace was already made and just waits to be received, what is one relationship of yours where you've been waiting for the other person to move first?

Coaching note: This is the commitment question — the whole night points here. Don't let it stay hypothetical. Get names and a 'when.' You go first.

If it stalls: Is there one person you've stopped texting? Just picture the last message you didn't send.

Questions You May Hear

"What does 'all the fullness' actually mean?"

The complete presence of God — not a portion, not a reflection, the whole of deity with nothing held back — took up residence in Christ. Paul says it plainly a chapter later: 'in

Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form' (Colossians 2:9).

"Why does it say 'firstborn from among the dead' — was Jesus the first person ever raised?"

Others were raised before and died again; Jesus is 'firstborn' in the sense of being first through death and out the other side permanently, ahead of everyone who trusts him. The same title in Revelation 1:5 ties his resurrection directly to his rule over every earthly power.

"Does 'reconcile to Himself all things' mean everyone and everything is automatically saved?"

Paul's point is the scope of Christ's peace-making work — things on earth and in heaven — accomplished at the cross by God's own initiative (2 Corinthians 5:19). It's the ground of reconciliation offered to the whole created order; the passage still calls people to receive that peace, not to assume it applies with no response.

"Why does Paul suddenly talk about the church in the middle of all this cosmic language?"

First-century readers pictured the whole universe as a giant body, so Paul borrows the image and stuns them with it — the body isn't the cosmos, it's the church, and its head is a particular man who died and rose. His universal reign and his headship over his people are one and the same gift (Ephesians 1:22-23).

For Experienced Leaders

- After the discussion, replay it in your head: did anyone actually move — concede a point, admit a ladder they've been climbing, name a relationship — or did the whole hour run on agreement? Pleasant consensus is the most common disguise for a lesson that changed nothing. If nobody moved, build a two-sided question in next week so there's something to move on.
- When you spot someone who visibly rethought something — you'll see it on their face — name it privately afterward: 'I saw you change your mind on that today, that's the whole point.' That quiet word does more than any recap.
- Grief will show up at question 4 whether you plan for it or not. Don't be afraid of the silence when it does. The worst thing you can do is fill it fast; the best thing is to let it breathe and then read 'firstborn from among the dead' one more time.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around the room. Each person says out loud one specific thing they'll do before we meet again — the honest good word about your church, the plain sentence to God about your grief, or the message you've been avoiding. Name it and name when.

Close by praying out loud over the exact things people just named — the specific cold relationship, the specific loss, the specific church they'll speak well of. Don't reach for a

written prayer; saying their actual words back to God is the point.

If you run out of time: If the room gets stuck at question 3 or 4 and someone's grief or a real relationship opens up, stay there. Do not push to finish all five. A room that truly sat with 'the firstborn from among the dead' beats a room that rushed to the finish line.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, text two or three people the one question: 'Did you send it?' — the message, the good word, the prayer they named. That single follow-up is what turns a nice night into a changed week.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/colossians/1-18-20/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- 'I feel close to God when I've _____.' Fill in your own blank — the ladder you tend to climb.
- One honest good word about your own church, in a full sentence:
- The one message you've been avoiding sending — write the single sentence here first:
- Say it back in your own words: what does it mean that peace was 'made,' not just declared?
- One thing you'll actually DO before next time, with a day attached:

Take-home actions:

- Next time someone runs down the church or another believer, don't join in. Speak of the church the way you'd speak of a body you belong to and love — even one honest good word out loud when complaining would be easier.
- If grief is close, sit with 'the firstborn from among the dead' and say it plainly to God — at the graveside, the kitchen table, or the car: my hope for the one I've lost rests on the risen Christ.
- Where a relationship has gone cold, send the message you've been avoiding. One sentence offering peace is enough to start — send it today.

The peace you long for was already made. It waits to be received.