For Faces He Never Saw

COLOSSIANS 2:1-5 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

Paul got down on his knees and fought in prayer for people he'd never even met, and if the wisest man in the room did that for strangers, you can do it for the one friend whose faith is quietly growing right now.

Opening Lines

There's a man in prison, and he can't sleep. He's praying so hard for a church he has never visited that he calls it a struggle. Ten miles away from that church is another one he's never seen either, and he's fighting for them too.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get every person to picture one specific face — a friend whose faith is quietly growing — and decide to fight for them the way Paul fought for faces he never saw.
- If you're short on time, cut: The banking-and-eye-salve history of Laodicea is great color, but cut it before you cut the moment where people name their person out loud.
- Where the moment lives: It lives in the naming — when someone says an actual name and admits they've never told that person they noticed their faith. Not in the treasure theology, as beautiful as it is.
- Your prep: Come with your own name already chosen and one specific thing you admire about that person's faith. If you can't do the exercise, don't ask them to.

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 (3 min). Read Colossians 2:1-5 aloud (2 min). Teach agōn / the wrestler image and the Laodicea context (8 min). Questions 1-3 with real silence (15 min). Teach 'treasures hidden in Christ' plus the friction question, question 4 (8 min). The naming exercise, question 5, on the handout then out loud (7 min). Close in prayer over their names (2 min). Transformation happens in the naming — protect those final 7 minutes. If short, cut the Laodicea history first.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening question about being prayed for (6 min). Read the passage (2 min). Teach agōn and why Paul wants them to KNOW (10 min). Questions 1-2, go around fully (14 min). Question 3 on slick teaching, get concrete (8 min). Question 4 friction question, assign someone the skeptic role (8 min). Naming exercise and question 5, everyone says

a name out loud (10 min). Prayer over the names (2 min). Transformation lives in the go-around at question 5. If short, cut question 3.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening, read the passage together (4 min). Quick note on agōn — Paul wrestling for strangers (4 min). Question 2 (why tell them?) and question 3 (slick takes) — pick whichever bites (10 min). Straight to question 5: name your person, would they know (10 min). Pray for those actual people before you leave (2 min). Transformation is the naming — skip everything else before you skip that. Cut the treasure-theology discussion first.

Silence

Silence is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately. Last week you learned the basics: ask, then shut your mouth and count. This week the harder rep: when you ask the naming question ('who is your person whose faith is quietly growing?'), you will feel the room's discomfort at getting personal, and you will be tempted to rescue them by giving your own answer or softening the question. Don't. Count to fifteen silently — not ten — and hold your face neutral. The extra five seconds is where the real name surfaces instead of the safe, generic one. If you break early you'll get 'my grandma, she's always been faithful.' If you hold, you'll get the actual person.

Why This Passage Matters

Most of us pray hardest for people we can see — the ones at our table, the ones who'll thank us. Paul does something stranger and larger here. He agonizes for the Colossians and the Laodiceans, then widens it further: 'all who have not met me face to face.' He is fighting on his knees for strangers, and he wants them to know it. Why does this matter for your room? Because faith is not a solo climb. Paul's whole aim is that their 'encouraged in heart, knit together in love.' We are made strong by being stitched to other people, and someone had to do the stitching. Someone had to notice. Epaphras carried the news of this church to Paul so Paul could pray. That's the chain — one person notices, another prays, a stranger a hundred miles away is held up before God. You are teaching people how to be a link in that chain for someone whose faith is quietly, unnoticed, growing right now. There are people in your room who have never once been told that their faith was seen. You get to hand them the tool to change that for somebody else. Few lessons let you do something that plainly kind.

Catch the Fire First

Before you teach a word of this, do the exercise yourself at home. Sit down and name one person whose faith is quietly growing — someone you've noticed but never told. Then write the specific thing you admire: not 'she's such a good Christian' but 'the way she keeps showing up to serve when no one's watching.' Feel how exposed it is to write it. Then send it. Text that person before the lesson. Walk into the room having already done the hard, warm, awkward thing you're about to ask them to do. When you tell the room 'I

sent mine this morning, here's what happened,' the exercise stops being a nice idea and becomes a thing real people actually do.

Bring Your Own Story

- Prompt: a time someone told you they'd been praying for you when you had no idea — how it landed.
- Prompt: a friend whose faith grew slowly and quietly, and whether you ever said you saw it.
- Prompt: a time you got pulled in by a slick, confident take on God before you checked it against Scripture.
- SAMPLE (polished vs. real): Polished — 'God taught me the value of Christian community that year.' Real — 'A guy I barely knew texted me a verse the exact week I was ready to quit, and I found out later he'd been praying for me by name for months.'
- Guardrail: keep it not-raw — tell the version you've already made peace with, not the one you're still bleeding from.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Picture a man in prison who cannot sleep. He's praying so hard for a church he has never set foot in that he calls it a struggle — the same word you'd use for a wrestling match. And here's the strange part: he wants them to know he's doing it. Today we find out why that mattered so much to him, and what it has to do with the person you'll think of in about ten minutes."

Start with a concrete scene, not a concept — people enter through a picture before they enter through an idea.

SMALL GROUP: "Quick one before we read: has anyone ever told you, out of the blue, that they'd been praying for you — and you had no idea? What did that do to you? Hold that feeling, because Paul is about to do exactly that to a whole church he's never met."

Open with a question that surfaces the theme from their own lives before the text is even read.

COFFEE: "Read this with me — Paul's writing to people he's never even met and he says he's struggling for them in prayer. Weird, right? Who does that? Let's figure out why, and then I want to ask you about someone specific in your life."

Lower the stakes and go straight personal — no runway needed with two or three friends.

Teaching the Word

The word to teach is Paul's word for struggle in verse 1: agōn. It's where we get 'agony,' and it's not a mild word. It's the word for a contest in the arena — a wrestler straining, a runner emptying the tank, muscles shaking. Paul says that's what his praying for these strangers looks like. Here's the physical image: stand up, plant your feet, and lean into an

invisible opponent the way a wrestler locks up — that tension in your whole body, that's the word. Paul is doing that on his knees, for faces he's never seen. Prayer here is not a soft, drowsy add-on to your day. It's exertion on behalf of someone else. And notice why he strains: 'that they may be encouraged in heart, knit together in love.' He wrestles so they can rest. Here's the line to leave hanging in the air: 'For although I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit.' [Let it sit. Don't fill the silence.]

Discussion Questions

1. Paul is praying hard for people he has never met. What's strange about that, and what does it tell you about how he sees prayer?

Coaching note: Let them sit with the oddness before rescuing it. Some will jump to 'well he's Paul' — push back gently: he's still a man in a cell with limited energy, and he spent it on strangers.

If it stalls: Have you ever prayed hard for someone you didn't personally know — a name in the news, a friend of a friend? What made you do it?

2. Paul wants them to KNOW he's struggling for them — he says so in verse 1. Why tell them? Why not just quietly pray?

Coaching note: This gets at the whole lesson. The point is that being noticed and told strengthens faith. Don't let it stay abstract — steer toward 'has anyone ever told you they were praying for you.'

If it stalls: If a friend told you today they'd been praying for you all month, would that change anything for you? Yes or no — why?

3. Paul warns 'so that no one will deceive you by smooth rhetoric.' What does slick, confident talk about God look like in your actual week — the influencer, the podcast, the coworker with a hot take?

Coaching note: Get concrete or it stays safe. If they can't name real examples, they won't recognize the real thing later. Watch for the room agreeing too fast here.

If it stalls: Think of the last confident thing you heard someone say about God online. Did you check it, or just nod?

4. Paul says all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ — a person, not a philosophy. Okay, but who reads that and finds it offensive or too simple? What's the strongest objection?

Coaching note: This is your friction question. If the room has gone warm and agreeable, this breaks it. Assign someone to argue the skeptic's side: 'isn't that intellectually lazy — just say the answer is Jesus?' Make them feel the edge before you resolve it.

If it stalls: Is there any part of you that wishes the answer were more complicated — a system, a secret, something you had to be smart to earn?

5. Who is one person whose faith is quietly growing right now — and would they know you noticed?

Coaching note: This is the whole lesson landing. Hold the silence — count to fifteen, not ten. Do not answer first. The second half of the question ('would they know') is the sting; let it land. Most people will realize the answer is no.

If it stalls: Just picture one Christian you're glad exists. Now: have you ever told them a specific thing you admire about their faith?

Questions You May Hear

"Where was Laodicea, and why does Paul mention them?"

Laodicea sat about ten miles from Colossae; both were in the Lycus Valley in what's now western Turkey and shared a river, a trade route, and the same false teachers. Paul later tells them to swap letters, so he's writing to the whole cluster of towns at once.

"What does 'mystery' mean here — is it something we can't understand?"

No — the Greek word mystērion doesn't mean a puzzle for clever people to solve. It means something God kept concealed for ages and has now flung wide open, which is Christ himself: 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.'

"What exactly was the false teaching Paul was worried about?"

Traveling teachers were selling an impressive blend of Jewish ritual, mystical visions, and philosophy — polished and flattering, not crude. That's why Paul warns about 'smooth rhetoric' rather than obvious lies.

"If wisdom is all in Christ, does that mean learning and study don't matter?"

Paul isn't against knowledge — he's against seeking it apart from Christ, like digging in the dust outside the treasury door. He says you don't have to be brilliant to be rich in Christ; you have to belong to him.

For Experienced Leaders

- When you ask them to name their person, do not scan the room waiting — look down at your own paper. People confess harder when they don't feel watched.
- If the room goes into warm agreeable mush on the 'treasures in Christ' section, hit them with the offense question. A room that only nods has quietly decided not to let the verse cost anything.
- Have your own text already sent before you teach. The moment you can say 'I did this at 7am, here's what she wrote back,' the exercise becomes real instead of assigned.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and have each person say out loud, in one sentence: the name of their person, and one specific thing they'll tell them this week. Out loud — saying the name commits it in a way that a private thought never will.

Close by praying out loud over the actual names people just said — their person, the thing they admire, the text they're about to send. Don't reach for anything written; naming their real words back to God is the whole point, and it models the very thing you just taught.

If you run out of time: If you only get to question two — the 'why tell them' question — and the room is genuinely wrestling with being noticed, stay there. That IS the lesson.

Don't rush to five just to finish the sheet.

Midweek follow-up: A week later, text the group one line: 'Did you send it? What happened?' Let people report back — the reports are half the discipleship.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/colossians/2-1-5/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- Paul's word for 'struggle' means the strain of a wrestler in the arena. Write one word for how you'd describe your own prayer life right now:

- Name a confident take on God you heard recently (podcast, post, person). Did you check it against Scripture, or just nod along?

- One person whose faith is quietly growing right now:

- One specific thing about their faith you admire (not 'she's a good Christian' — the actual thing):

- Would they know you noticed? Write yes or no — and if no, when will you tell them?

Take-home actions:

- Text a Christian friend you haven't spoken with in a while and tell them plainly that you thank God for them — name one specific thing about their faith you admire.

- When a claim about God sounds slick and certain this week, pause and ask one question: does this line up with what Scripture actually says about Christ? Look it up before you swallow it.

- Pray for one friend by name before you sleep tonight — the way Paul held people he'd never met, present in prayer though far away.

Colossians 2:1-5 · The Deep Dive, Lesson 7 · In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.