POLITICAL TALK
A COLOSSIAN WAY SERIES

Engage Conflicts FAITHFULLY
CONFLICT IS A GIFT

Political Talk is a Colossian Way curriculum. The Colossian Way is a method that equips Christian organizations to engage conflict in ways that reflect Christ. It features innovative, resource-rich curricula based on traditional Christian practices that address timely, complex topics.

INTRODUCING POLITICAL TALK

This excerpt of Political Talk offers a glimpse into The Colossian Way framework, how Political Talk equips us to engage our deepest political conflicts faithfully, and what it’s like to be part of a small group. For more information or to order your copy of the complete curriculum, please visit colossianforum.org/store.

Political Talk is for you if:
• You’ve lost a relationship because of a political disagreement.
• You find the binary choices our political system offers confining and hopeless.
• You’re hungry to find a faithful way to engage political conflicts.
• You want to live into your Christian role as reconciler but aren’t sure how.
• You long to activate and deepen your faith in our polarized environment.

Political Talk Participants will:
• Gain conflict engagement skills that translate into any context.
• Learn Christian practices for engaging political disagreements.
• Understand the loves and fears behind our political positions.
• Stay in community and communion with those you love without avoiding political discussions.

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THE COLOSSIAN WAY MANUAL
The Colossian Way Manual provides a deeper dive into The Colossian Way method, including the vision and goals for the framework, marks of an effective Facilitator, resources for recruiting members for and shepherding a Colossian Way group, and other support tools.

SUPPLEMENTAL CONTENT
We’ve augmented each session with videos and printed supplements that foster group interaction and in-depth exploration of the topic.

FACILITATOR GUIDE AND PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK
The Facilitator Guide includes dialogue guides, exercises, videos, and tips to help Facilitators guide Participants through each of the 10 sessions. It also includes excerpts from the Participant Workbook and links to videos and printed supplements.

The Participant Workbook allows Participants to follow along and engage with and reflect on each session. It includes note-taking space for responses, thoughts, questions, prayer requests, laments, and hopes as they journey through the curriculum.

Introduction
Part 1
FACILITATOR GUIDE EXCERPT
Session Structure
A Colossian Way small group meets for ten 90-minute sessions.

Each session follows the same pattern of five phases:

- **Start**: Introduce the session’s topic, connecting with God and one another.
- **Unity**: Learn and practice a Christian commitment that supports the work.
- **Prayer**: Seek God’s help for the work.
- **Engage**: Do some of the messy work of talking well about politics as Christians.
- **Godward**: Reflect to God our praises, our laments for what is going wrong, and our hopes for the future.

We at The Colossian Forum, as your brothers and sisters in Christ, pray that your time invested in the topic of political talk, and invested in one another, will bear important fruit, to the glory of God.

Series Overview

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Note: The timing of phases in sessions 1 and 10 varies slightly.
Using This Facilitator Guide

Each chapter contains a session walkthrough to guide you, step-by-step, through the session. Keeping to the schedule can be a challenge in these gatherings, so you’ll find a timeline that allocates time to each part of the session. While Colossian Way Facilitators must constantly improvise, these timelines are realistic for a typical session. If you use extra time at one point, you’ll need to catch up somewhere else.

Each session walkthrough contains the same design features to help guide you through the various aspects of the session. Here are the key visual cues you will see in each session:

- A quotation mark signifies that the text following it is a suggested script for Facilitators to use as you guide Participants through the session. Feel free to use your own words instead, or to adapt the script to your own (and your group’s) personality. Note that bold text within the script highlights questions as they appear in the Participant Workbook.

- A vertical line followed by indented and italicized text is instruction for Facilitators as you move through the session. These instructions typically occur in the middle or at the end of script text. Here’s an example:

  Give your group a moment to reflect and then preview the session.

- The “Time Check” markers indicate an opportunity to check your overall session time. Each session is 90 minutes long, and these markers will help remind you where you should be, time wise, as you move through the session.

- The “Play” icon indicates places where you will be invited to play a video.

- Hints are provided throughout the Facilitator Guide to provide additional information for leading the session, including explanations for how the different elements complement one another, how to respond to common situations, and what Facilitators might expect along the way.

Along with these visual cues, you will also periodically see “Participant Workbook” text boxes. These provide the content that your Participants will have in front of them in their Participant Workbook. Page numbers are also included in the text box so that you can direct the Participants to a specific page in the Participant Workbook without having it open in front of you (note that Participants using an eBook version of the Participant Workbook may not have the same page numbers to reference).

Colossians 1:15-20

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

We hope this Facilitator Guide provides what you need to lead your group fruitfully. Please reserve some time to read the guide for each session in advance of your meeting, thinking through the activities and prayerfully reflecting on how best to lead your group. And remember that, regardless of how much preparation you do, unpredictable things will surely happen when your group gathers!
Why This Topic?
As you get started with this Colossian Way series, the first session is introductory, both to the method and to the topic. You’ll also introduce yourselves and what you hope to gain from the group. Your group will begin asking what it might mean to talk about politics and to worship God in the same breath. In terms of content, the session topic is “Political Conflict,” which isn’t just about ugly fighting; it’s about disagreement that has the possibility of moving forward, both in making political decisions and in deepening our relationships with one another as a political community. Conflict over political issues is usually a mixture of good and bad. This session’s practices will begin the process of bringing political disagreements to the surface so that good work can be done with those disagreements.

Session Flow
START  
As your group gathers for this first session, everyone will have a chance to introduce themselves. You’ll also introduce the goals and structure of The Colossian Way. The Start phase also includes a preview of the topic for this session and a welcoming of God’s presence in your midst. The Start phase runs longer than normal in this session.

UNITY  
Setting the Goals  
Taking up The Colossian Way requires a mindset shift away from anxiously pushing for consensus on “the right answer” and toward a mode of engaging important matters that fits with the basics of the Christian faith.

PRAYER  
Colossians 1:15-20  
The Colossian Way takes its name from this passage, where we are assured of Christ’s ability to hold all things together and make peace. Within this promise, you will be able to bring the tensions you experience over political conflicts into prayer.

ENGAGE  
Political Conflict  
After watching a video describing the nature of politics and political conflict, you’ll practice sharing your concerns about a political issue and exploring the concerns with others.

GODWARD  
The practice of reflecting on your work by offering praises, laments, and hopes to God will be a regular part of your sessions.
The title of this Colossian Way series is “Political Talk.” For a lot of people, this says that you’re going to gather and hash out the pressing political issues of our time by debating different perspectives and approaches. While you will practice talking about a number of important political issues over the course of these ten sessions, the focus here is less on the issues than on the way we talk about them. Further, you’ll explore some of the forces underneath your political talk. How did you come to your viewpoints? How do your social circles affect where you stand on the issues? What are you hoping to accomplish when you talk about politics? These are more personal questions than disembodied battles over the best policy moving forward.

Practices and Formation

Throughout the ages, Christian pastors have recommended certain spiritual disciplines or practices as aids for growing as a Christian. Some traditional practices are activities that we add to our lives, such as study, worship, service, prayer, fellowship, and confession. Other traditional practices ask us to refrain from doing something, as with solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, and chastity. For centuries, these practices have been seen as part of joining the Holy Spirit’s work in forming us into more faithful Christ-followers.

The Colossian Way invites a small group of Christians to take up some specialized practices that seem appropriate for our age of polarized division. Situated within worship, Scripture, and prayer, you will practice talking about politics as Christians. In this first session, your practice involves voicing your concerns about guns and asking others about their concerns. These are simple things. But simple things, done as offerings to Christ, can be profound.

Pausing to Reflect

Your Colossian Way practice involves moments of reflection about what’s happened in your time together. You’ll regularly debrief your experience, talking both to one another and to God. These times of reflection are critical for moving from activity to personal transformation. The meaning of our activities so quickly disappears as we move to the next thing on our list. Taking time to digest what we’ve experienced deepens the impact of those experiences.

Ignatius Loyola, the sixteenth-century Spanish founder of the Jesuit order, encouraged members to follow a daily process of reflection called the examen. It involves taking a break in the middle of the day to move through five steps of reflection: gratitude to God, asking for the Spirit’s help, reviewing the day in light of God’s presence, naming sin and asking for forgiveness, and praying for the grace to be more available to God.
Welcome and Introduction to Session Topic

Welcome to our Colossian Way small group on “Political Talk.” [Other Facilitator’s name] and I will be facilitating our time together.

In this first session, we’ll get to know each other, start to explore our experiences of political division, and learn how our time with The Colossian Way will work.

You should each have a workbook, which has a section for each of our ten sessions. If you turn to page 10, we’ll look at what we’ll be doing together in this first session.

Our topic for this session is “Political Conflict.”

Follow along with me on page 10 of your workbook.

This session begins with an observation that shouldn’t catch anyone by surprise.

Use the text in the workbook (included on the next page) to introduce the topic for this session.

- Read the opening question (“Why is political talk ...?”), pausing to let it sink in.
- Read the plain text (“Important disagreement ...”), perhaps commenting on it in light of your own group members’ interests.
- Finish with “In this session ...”
Why We’re Here, Goals, and Invocation and Confession

At this point in each session, I’ll read a brief reminder of our purpose for being here. You can follow along in the section “Why We’re Here” on page 12 of your workbook.

Why We’re Here. Read this paragraph to introduce everyone to the purpose of this group.

In each session, we’ll also name the three goals for our meeting. We’ll explore these goals along the way, and we’ll use them to help measure how well we’re doing. Who would like to read for us the “Goals of The Colossian Way” in your workbook on page 12?

Goals of The Colossian Way. Invite someone in your group to read the three goals of The Colossian Way.

We will also pray together three times in each session, at the beginning, middle, and end. These prayers are not simply “Christian-y” things we do. They are meant to shape our time together because we are joining God’s work here in our world. Praying together helps us remember that.

Here at the beginning, we pray a brief invocation and confession. An invocation is a way of speaking in recognition that God is here among us. Of course, God is always with us, but saying it out loud together helps tune us into that reality. We’ll also confess together a couple of basic truths of our faith. A “confession” of this sort doesn’t mean saying we’ve done something wrong. Rather, it’s a reminder to one another, with God, about what is true.

The words are in your workbook on page 13. I’ll lead by reading the light text and we’ll all say the bold text together.

Invocation and Confession. Acknowledge God’s presence by reading the plain text, with the whole group responding with the bold text. If you and your group prefer a less formal alternative, simply say, “Thank you, Lord, for being with us today.”
Unity

SESSION 1: POLITICAL CONFLICT

Many Colossian Way Facilitators and Participants report that getting to know the people in their group was one of the most meaningful parts of their experience. We have about two minutes for each person, so as we introduce ourselves we'll also practice sharing our time.

As we go around, I'll ask each of you to tell us four things. These prompts are in your workbook on page 13:

1. Your name.
2. One way you have connected with our church family (or a way you would like to connect).
3. What you're giving up in order to be part of this group—in other words, what you would be doing with this time if you weren't here.
4. What you're hoping to gain from this group.

Pause for about a minute while Participants make notes in their workbook.

Then, beginning with yourself, go around the circle for introductions. If someone takes significantly less than two minutes, you could invite them to share more about what they're giving up or hoping to gain. If someone takes substantially more time, you could help them yield the floor by saying something like, "Because of time we'll need to move on to the next person, but we'll have more time to share throughout our ten sessions together."

Hint

Many Colossian Way Facilitators and Participants report that getting to know the people in their group was one of the most meaningful parts of their experience. Even when they had known each other for years, the story-sharing deepened existing relationships. Model appropriate transparency and vulnerability for your group and don't shortchange the time allotted for getting to know one another.

Time Check: You should now be roughly 30 minutes into your 90-minute session.

SESSION WALKTHROUGH

Unity Outline

15 MINUTES TOTAL

Video

Discussion

Setting the Goals

In each session, we will have a Unity phase where we focus on one aspect of our Christian commitment that will help us do the work of political talk faithfully. We'll reflect on something we hold to be true and important, something that helps us see the difference being a Christian makes.

When we later engage political matters, we'll bring these commitments to bear on our political talk.

Being Christians affects how we think about all sorts of issues, as we'll discover when we talk about gun issues later. But being Christian should also affect how we engage issues, not just what we think about them. In politics, avoiding conflict is impossible. Is it possible to do politics in a beautiful way, a way that glorifies Jesus, deepens our faith, and contributes positively to our shared life?

Our faith commitments won't make the work of talking about politics easy. They won't hand us simple answers. But they will provide starting points for working together on political challenges in ways that reflect the gospel of Jesus. Even more importantly, these basic commitments affect all the different parts of our life before God. Our work here is about more than political talk. It's about growing together as Christians.

For now, let's begin by watching a video that introduces The Colossian Way in more depth and reflects on our goals. There's space in your workbook on page 14 to take notes.

Watch the video: "Setting the Goals"

Video link: tcway.org/pt1unity
“Out of Joint” in Our Political Talk?

In a few minutes we’ll turn to prayer, but let’s share some things together first. In The Colossian Way, we regularly remember that Christ is holding “all things together” because it can sometimes seem like things are flying apart. We need healing. We are seeking peace.

Let’s take a few minutes to share what we feel is falling apart in politics, what we feel needs healing, where we are hoping for peace.

There’s a space to make notes in your workbook on page 15, starting with some prompts to help you think about this. You might focus on a personal relationship that is strained or broken. Or you might be concerned about things flying apart around a particular political issue. Or you might feel a need for things to be held together better in the news or on social media.

As you make notes, remember that we’re doing this as Christians. If our hope is that Jesus holds all things together, what are you longing for? In your workbook, immediately after the prompts you’ll see the sentence: “When I think of Jesus holding ‘all things together,’ even in our political talk, I long for ...” Take a minute or so to complete this sentence, and then we’ll share what we’ve written.

Offer your group about a minute to make some notes.

Before we share, I want to say something about our group’s dynamic. We want to feel free to speak honestly and vulnerably with one another here. It’s important that we be able to speak from our hearts, which involves some risk. Or you might be concerned about things flying apart around a particular political issue. Or you might feel a need for things to be held together better in the news or on social media.

As you make notes, remember that we’re doing this as Christians. If our hope is that Jesus holds all things together, what are you longing for? In your workbook, immediately after the prompts you’ll see the sentence: “When I think of Jesus holding ‘all things together,’ even in our political talk, I long for ...” Take a minute or so to complete this sentence, and then we’ll share what we’ve written.

Offer your group about a minute to make some notes.

Before we share, I want to say something about our group’s dynamic. We want to feel free to speak honestly and vulnerably with one another here. It’s important that we be able to speak from our hearts, which involves some risk. Let’s be careful about how we talk outside our group. Sharing ourselves and our stories is a sacred trust. I ask that we be conscious of walking faithfully and tenderly with what is shared here. Remember the Golden Rule—don’t share or talk about others in ways you wouldn’t want them to share or talk about you.

Does anyone have questions about speaking vulnerably in this group?

Address any concerns raised by group members. It might not be helpful to try to build official ground rules; rather, move in the direction of caring about one another in how we speak outside the group.

Okay, let’s go around and say how we completed that sentence: “When I think of Jesus holding ‘all things together,’ even in our political talk, I long for ...” Choose someone to start and then go around the circle, inviting each person to share what they long for.

If you have time, invite interaction over some of what was shared.

Let’s take a moment to reflect together on some of the things we shared. What struck you as you listened to the things we are longing for?

Professing that “all things hold together” in Christ can become a mere slogan if we don’t begin connecting it to the things that we trust Jesus is actually holding together. This exercise begins the process of surfacing the things we feel are strained and coming apart around the theme of political talk.

It also prepares for the following time of prayer where you will read the passage of Scripture containing this promise. After talking together about the things you want held together, you have the opportunity to bring these strains to God in prayer.

Such simple practices change things. The way we view our strains changes when we situate them within worship. Even though God already knows what you want, you are asked to voice your concerns in prayer. And further, this prepares you for joining the Holy Spirit’s activity in and through you all as participants with Jesus in holding all things together.

As Christ’s body, we have a role in that work.

Time Check: You should now be roughly 45 minutes into your 90-minute session.
Prayer

SESSION 1: POLITICAL CONFLICT

Scripture

In each session, we take time in the middle to reflect on a Bible passage and pray together. This helps us keep centered on our Christian commitments and dependence on God for doing anything that testifies to the difference Jesus makes.

On page 16 of your workbook, you’ll find a Scripture reading. Colossians 1 describes the centrality of Jesus and his important work of healing the brokenness of our world. Things are not out of control, because Jesus is at work to reconcile all things. He is actively holding all things together, even when it doesn’t look that way.

As you listen to this passage, let a word, phrase, idea, or image speak to you. We’ll take a moment to share what struck us, and then spend a few minutes in prayer.

"Prayer Outline

10 MINUTES TOTAL

Scripture

Prayer"

I’ll pause for a moment of silence to quiet our hearts, and then I’ll read the passage out loud.

Pause for a moment of silence and then read Colossians 1:15-20 out loud to the group.

Colossians 1:15-20

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church, he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Reflect for a moment on the word, phrase, idea, or image that stood out to you.

Give Participants 30 seconds of silence for reflection.

Now, I invite you to share what struck you from the passage.

Allow a few minutes of space for Participants to share what struck them from the Scripture passage.

It can be difficult for people to share their thoughts on Scripture, especially as they are first getting to know one another. It’s reasonable to feel that our own reflections are unimportant, or even invalid. If you’re met with silence, you could try something creative, such as reading the passage again, slowly, one sentence at a time. You can encourage people to share whatever comes to mind, even if it doesn’t seem relevant or important. You could ask if this idea of holding all things together is new to people, or perhaps even doesn’t make sense in light of all of the problems we see in our world. It’s okay to explore and push on Scripture together.
Prayer

Let’s bring to God some of the things we are thinking and feeling as we reflect on this passage of Scripture. We can talk to God about all of these things: what we long for, what feels out of joint with God’s intention, things we don’t understand, and the hope we have that things will be set right.

Let’s spend a few minutes praying together. There are also some suggested starting points for prayer on page 17 in your workbook. After several of us have prayed, I’ll invite us to close with the Lord’s Prayer.

Allow several people to pray. If you feel anxious that no one is praying, allow the silence to linger for a bit before contributing your own prayers, trusting that God is working in the silence too. When you sense it’s time to pray together in closing, introduce the Lord’s Prayer.

As we close with the Lord’s Prayer, this week we remember the opening words, “Our Father.” God is our father, who loves us and our world so much. May we recognize God as our good and loving father as we pray together:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.

Prayer prepares us to take up the practice of engaging political talk as part of our Christian worship. We pray not because we have to but because we are invited to share with God who we are, what we think, and how we feel. As we build our trust together as a group, we will deepen in our ways of praying together.

Time Check: You should now be roughly 55 minutes into your 90-minute session.

Political Conflict

With this preparation, let’s move into real political talk. We’ll start with a video that explains a bit about what politics is and why we argue about politics so much, even as Christians. Then we’ll practice talking about one particular political issue: gun violence and gun control.

Watch the video: “Political Conflict”  
Video link: tcway.org/pt1engage

Engage Outline

30 MINUTES TOTAL

Video  
Discussion  
Debrief

Hint

Here are some of the important points in this video:

- “Politics” is about working together to shape our shared life and requires making difficult choices.
- The complexity of life, the differences between people, and our sin nature mean there will always be conflict over how to build a good life together.
- Christians face conflict over politics too, both in our shared life within our churches and in our wider public lives. The “law of love” guides us, but doesn’t provide easy answers.
Engage

SESSION 1 : POLITICAL CONFLICT

Voicing Our Concerns about Guns and Gun Control

“Okay, let’s go around the circle and share how you answer this question: “When I think about guns, gun violence, and gun control, what personally concerns me most is ...”

Do a go-around. If there’s remaining time, follow up with the follow-on questions.

Possible Follow-on Questions:

- Which concerns about guns seem to be shared by all of us, and which concerns appear to be inevitably conflicted?
- How are our visions for “the good life” concerning guns the same, and how are our visions different?

Offer the group about 30 seconds to write some notes in their workbook.

These optional Follow-on Questions invite your group to reflect on the inevitability of political conflict on this issue.

Sometimes the end-goals people want are very much aligned—for example, to reduce the number of violent gun deaths as much as possible. But even then, there will likely be disagreements about how much should be sacrificed in order to attain that goal. Should guns be eliminated entirely for private citizens? How about for police? Should they still carry guns? These disagreements and the ensuing conflicts are important for figuring out how we will live together.

Sometimes our differences come from having a different view of what “the good life” should look like. For example, some people might want hunting and target shooting to be flourishing pastimes, while others’ dislike for guns might be so strong that they don’t think these activities should be part of our culture.

Sometimes our conflicting concerns can be resolved with creative new ideas or constructive compromise, but certainly not always.

By reflecting on the ways our different concerns about guns are aligned and conflicted, your group will gain a deeper appreciation for the shape of political conflict.

"Naming concerns" is a useful practice for starting to talk about a political issue. It backs us away from whatever political posturing the different advocacy groups are doing. Rather, it gives each person a chance to name what they think needs addressing. Often this comes out of personal experiences that have had a big effect on our way of looking at things.

Putting a wide range of concerns on the table helps to get a view of the whole and avoid falling immediately into an entrenched debate between two different policy options.

It’s important to realize that we’re unlikely to talk someone out of their concern. Rather, bringing different concerns together helps for weighing them, and allowing them to push on each other to see what needs addressing first.

Finally, hearing one another’s concerns helps us get to know each other better and build trust. It allows us to start seeing things through someone else’s eyes and to see others as fellow human beings.

Take a moment to write some notes about your main concern.

"Naming concerns" is a useful practice for starting to talk about a political issue. It backs us away from whatever political posturing the different advocacy groups are doing. Rather, it gives each person a chance to name what they think needs addressing. Often this comes out of personal experiences that have had a big effect on our way of looking at things.

Putting a wide range of concerns on the table helps to get a view of the whole and avoid falling immediately into an entrenched debate between two different policy options.

It’s important to realize that we’re unlikely to talk someone out of their concern. Rather, bringing different concerns together helps for weighing them, and allowing them to push on each other to see what needs addressing first.

Finally, hearing one another’s concerns helps us get to know each other better and build trust. It allows us to start seeing things through someone else’s eyes and to see others as fellow human beings.

Take a moment to write some notes about your main concern.

After voicing our concerns, we’ll take up a second practice of asking each other questions about our concerns. But first, think about what concerns you most about guns. There’s a space to write some notes in your workbook on page 18. You’ll also find there some sample statements that might get you started.

Take a moment to write some notes about your main concern.

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Finally, hearing one another’s concerns helps us get to know each other better and build trust. It allows us to start seeing things through someone else’s eyes and to see others as fellow human beings.
It may seem simple, but we’ve done something significant just now. We’ve thought about our personal concerns around a political issue and then given voice to those concerns. Further, we’ve listened to each other’s concerns. This is a tool we can use as we lean into political conflicts. We can ask ourselves and others about what concerns us. As simple as that is, it’s an important step for productive political talk.

Let’s take it a step further and practice asking someone more about their concern. We’ll do this as a “fishbowl exercise” where two of us take up the practice and the rest of us observe.

I’m going to choose one person to talk more about the concern they shared. Then I’ll ask for a volunteer to ask the person with that concern to tell us more about it.

Pick one person who shared a concern and then find a volunteer who would be willing to ask them to share more about their concern.

We’ll take about five minutes to hear more about this concern. As you ask questions, your goal isn’t to try to talk the person out of their concern. You’re not listening in order to refute their concern but to gain insight into it. Your job is to ask genuine questions of curiosity. Explore the concern they’ve named and see how much more you can learn about it. Invite them to go deeper. Some sample questions of curiosity are in your workbook on page 19.

If you start to ask a question that challenges the person or tries to talk them out of their concern, it’s the whole group’s responsibility to call that out and help you rephrase your question. There’s a time for challenging and persuading, but that’s not what we’re doing right now. As these two work together, the rest of us will watch as we quietly support the practice of asking questions of curiosity.

Is everyone clear about what we’re doing?

If anyone is unclear on the exercise and its goals, try to clarify things.

Okay, go ahead and ask your first question and the rest of us will observe.

Allow the rest of the allotted time to go to exploring a Participant’s concerns more deeply. If you have time, or if the questions run out of steam too quickly, consider choosing a second person’s concern and a second question-asking volunteer. Then repeat the exercise.
Debrief

Save five minutes at the end of the Engage phase to reflect on the practices from this session.

“As we start to wrap things up, let’s reflect together on the practices we’ve taken up in this session. There’s a summary on page 20 of your workbook.

First, we’ve connected with one another through our introductions, hearing something of who we are and our hopes for this group. As Christians, talking about politics starts with seeing each other as people made in God’s image. We all have full, complex lives and are much more than our political views.

Second, we read Scripture and prayed together. We’ve intentionally included God in our conversation.

Third, we’ve voiced our concerns about the issues surrounding guns. Rather than just taking up one side or the other on an issue, we’ve reflected on what matters to us personally.

Fourth, we’ve practiced asking questions of curiosity to gain insight into another person’s concerns.

How do you feel about what we’ve done here? How have these practices been helpful? How were they challenging? What have you had difficulty communicating that seems important at this point?

Allow a few minutes for your group to debrief about the experience of this session.

A few minutes of recap and debrief at the end of the session helps to consolidate and evaluate what’s happened in the session. It may be that people feel the practices and work are trivial, that little has been accomplished. But it is no small thing to grow in our understanding of ourselves and one another around a difficult political issue. Even more important, it is challenging to connect seemingly abstract theological concepts, such as Jesus reconciling all things, to the concrete realities of talking with one another about our daily political concerns.

If we are to witness the body of Christ built up, it will likely be in small ways that we might not notice without paying attention.

It’s not uncommon for Participants to criticize the curriculum, the structure of the session, the makeup of the group, the way you are facilitating, and so on. Hearing such criticism can be difficult and can tempt you to go on the defensive out of anxiety. There’s no need to argue that the curriculum is flawless. Instead, try to listen well to the criticism, inviting others’ thoughts on it. Take such moments as opportunities for your group to engage disagreement well and care about the person who is upset.

Possible Follow-on Questions:

- How do you feel about yourself and the other person when they ask you more about why you feel the way you do about an issue?
- How does asking more about someone’s concern about a political issue demonstrate our Christian commitments to humility, gentleness, patience, and caring for others as more important than ourselves?

Time Check: You should now have roughly five minutes left in your 90-minute session.
We'll save a few minutes at the end of every session to return in prayer to God. We named our goals at the beginning: to gather, to practice loving God and one another while engaging the challenge of talking about politics, and to witness the body of Christ built up. It's time to reflect back to God on what happened when we tried to do that.

We'll reflect on what happened in three movements: praise, lament, and hope. We can do that in a few words, with eyes open, to one another and to God at the same time.

Let’s begin with praise. What happened here that we are thankful to God for? Just speak out loud a word or sentence of praise.

Feel free to offer some of your own praise to get things going. But be okay with a bit of silence. It could be as simple as praising God that we get to do this together. Or that God has given us the courage to start talking about this difficult topic. Or that God is with us as we try.

After a couple of minutes, switch to lament.

Now let’s voice our laments. What makes us sad? What do we lament about our broken world? What do we lament about ourselves, our group, and our interactions with one another here? We can share these things honestly with God and one another.

Then close with hopes.

Finally, we look to the future. The experience of breaking the silence and engaging one another often brings hope. Go ahead and name it. What hopes do we hold for our world? What hopes do we hold for ourselves, our group, and our work together?

Christian formation happens slowly over time. Regular practice forms new habits and instincts in us. While these “60-second practices” are simple, they give us concrete ways to practice loving God and one another while engaging the challenge of talking about politics well.

Read the practice to the group. Then close with everyone saying the benediction.

Let’s say our benediction to one another: Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.
Part 2

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK EXCERPT
Why is political talk so filled with ugly conflict?

Important disagreement over political matters has become so inflamed that bringing up a political topic sometimes feels risky. We’re too often pushed apart by political differences, finding our relationships strained and broken as a result. This Colossian Way series focuses on political division, believing our strained conflicts can be places of Christian formation. We believe our Christian faith provides deep resources that can guide and form us to engage political differences in surprisingly positive, even redemptive, ways.

Political talk, though naturally filled with conflict, can be a positive place for building a shared life together in our shared world.

In this session, we’ll start to get to know one another and begin exploring some of our conflicting political views.
Why We’re Here
Each time we gather, we’ll engage one aspect of how we talk about politics. But before we do that, each session will begin by focusing on our Christian commitments, so that the way we talk about political issues is framed by the difference it makes that we are Christians.

We’ll meet together ten times, with each session having a similar flow. As we repeat this pattern of situating our political talk within prayer and worship, we will practice ways to bring our Christian faith and our political talk together. Our hope is that this practice will instill in us, as individuals and as a group, new capacities for testifying to our God as we engage the complex world of politics.

Goals of The Colossian Way
• Gather Christians together.
• Practice loving God and neighbor while engaging difficult problems.
• Witness the body of Christ built up.

Invocation and Confession
Leader: We gather in God’s presence, grateful for one another.
All: To you, O God, we lift up our souls; in you we trust, O God. (Psalm 25:1)

Leader: We commit ourselves to learning your way, O Lord. Help us, we pray.
All: Show us your ways, O Lord, teach us your paths; guide us in your truth and teach us, for you are God our Savior, and our hope is in you all day long. (Psalm 25:4-5)

Introductions
1. Your name.
2. One way you have connected with our church family (or a way you would like to connect).
3. What you’re giving up in order to be part of this group—in other words, what you would be doing with this time if you weren’t here.
4. What you’re hoping to gain from this group.
Setting the Goals
This video (tcway.org/pt1unity) introduces The Colossian Way in more depth and reflects on our goals.

What’s “Out of Joint” in Our Political Talk?
“In Christ, all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

What do you feel needs holding together in our political talk?
What’s “out of joint”? What needs healing? Where do we yearn for peace?

Think of:
• your personal relationships,
• an important political issue,
• disagreements between Christians, and
• local, state, national, or world politics.

Complete this sentence:
When I think of Jesus holding “all things together,” even in our political talk, I long for ...
Colossians 1:15-20

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Possible Starting Points for Prayer:

- Jesus, reveal yourself to a world that resists you.
- Give me patient love in my strained relationships.
- Guide our political leaders to work together toward real solutions.
- Protect those who are at risk because of our policy of
  - Help me in my fear and anger over politics.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.
Political Conflict

This video (tcway.org/g1engage) offers a brief introduction to what politics is and why we argue about it so much, even as Christians.

Voicing Our Concerns about Guns and Gun Control

When I think about guns, gun violence, and gun control, what personally concerns me most is ...

Example Concerns about Guns and Gun Control

- There are dangerous people around who can get guns too easily.
- The government steps beyond its bounds when it restricts access to guns.
- I have a right to defend myself with a gun against criminals.
- I feel unsafe knowing that concealed handguns are around.
- Arguing about gun control distracts us from helping the mentally ill and punishing criminals.
- The National Rifle Association has too much influence over government gun policy.
- Fear of guns is destroying our honorable American heritage of hunting and shooting.

Questions of Curiosity

Example Questions

- Why is this important to you?
- What is at the heart of your concern?
- How did you come to be concerned about this? Are there particular experiences that led you to this view?
- How do the views of your friends and family compare with yours?
- Do you have any mixed feelings about it?
Debrief This Session’s Practices

**Practices**
- Connect personally before engaging political issues.
- Include God in the conversation, whether in private or through shared Scripture reading and prayer.
- Voice personal concerns about the issue rather than simply voicing our positions.
- Ask questions of curiosity to gain insight into the other person’s concerns.

**Questions**
- How have these practices been helpful?
- How were they challenging?
- What have you had difficulty communicating that seems important at this point?

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**Praise**
Thanking God for what is going well in our group and our world.

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**Lament**
Acknowledging what is going wrong in our group and our world.

---

**Hope**
Looking toward the future for ourselves and our world.

---

Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.
**SESSION 1: POLITICAL CONFLICT**

**Daily 60-Second Practice**

In between sessions, consider keeping your workbook at your desk or on your nightstand as a reminder to take up a quick practice each day until the group gathers again.

- Each day, take a minute to think about a political issue in that day’s news. Complete this sentence: “When I consider this issue, I’m concerned that ...” Pray briefly about your concern.

- Extra Credit: Sometime this week, when someone expresses to you an opinion or perspective on something, ask them a question of curiosity to learn more about their point of view. This could happen in person, on social media, at work, or with your family or friends.

**Benediction**

*Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.*
Part 3

THE COLOSSIAN WAY MANUAL EXCERPT
1. Welcome

Thank you for embarking on the journey of leading a Colossian Way small group.

As a Colossian Way Facilitator, your primary task is to accompany a diverse small group of Christians as you lean together into questions regarding messy situations, pursuing truth and love together, and looking to see God’s presence and activity among you.

This manual seeks to supplement The Colossian Way Facilitator training experience with additional information and, at the same time, repeats some of the key points communicated during the training itself. It is a valuable resource both prior to and during the time a Colossian Way group meets.

This manual includes an overview of the Facilitator’s job, the basic ideas behind The Colossian Way, and provides the guidance you need to launch and lead a Colossian Way small group.

We’ve also included additional resources in this manual that will help you lead discussions. There are answers to a series of frequently asked questions about The Colossian Way. And, for further reading, there are references to a variety of articles and books on related topics.

It takes time to absorb it all. It’s better to read it in little bursts rather than all at once. Time invested here will pay you back richly as you lead your group. Come back often.

As questions or problems arise, help is available directly from us at The Colossian Forum. You can reach us at tcw@colossianforum.org. We’d also value hearing from you at that email address if you’d be willing to share some of the things you’re learning through The Colossian Way.

You are an encouragement to us and other Colossian Way Facilitators!

Again, thank you for joining the growing community of Christians who are taking up The Colossian Way!

2. The Colossian Way

The Colossian Way provides a new way to think about conflicts among Christians. But, at its core, it’s all about remembering the basics of the gospel, and remembering that the truths of the gospel are true all the more when the pressure rises.

This section of the manual introduces the vision, goals, and commitments behind The Colossian Way and then describes some of the foundational ideas that undergird it.

2.1. Our Reason for Being

The church is shrinking in the West. Its positive contribution to the wider culture is in decline, and young people are leaving in droves. Why is this? It’s at least in part because in the face of today’s messiest cultural conflicts the church just doesn’t “smell like Jesus.”

Responding to this, The Colossian Forum’s mission and The Colossian Way program equips Christians to embrace conflicts as an opportunity for discipleship and witness.

2.2. Our Vision

The Colossian Way describes a process for gathering Christians together to engage a messy situation with the expectation that God will glorify himself in the midst of the difficulties.

In a culture of polarized conflict, Christians are tempted to adopt the ways of the world rather than pursuing faithfulness to Christ in the face of such division. The Colossian Way invites Christians to pursue self-consciously Christian modes of engagement. Our vision is to encourage Christian communities to act Christian under pressure.
This doesn’t mean the path to Christian faithfulness is always lined with roses and sweetness, however. Rather, it’s a path sometimes marked by difficulty and failure. Fortunately, the God of the resurrection often brings new life out of apparent failure.

As we follow The Colossian Way, the messy situations we typically fear and avoid turn out to be places of renewed discipleship. As we walk through difficulties with our brothers and sisters (even our difficult brothers and sisters!), we discover that God uses these difficulties as places of transformation.

In this way, we learn the patience of Christ, the forbearance of Christ, and the gentleness of Christ. We discover what Paul discovered: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10). In the very middle of intense challenges, we discover that we are made—individually and together—into the image of Jesus.

Our fractured culture has almost given up hope that people who disagree about important things can work together and display a beautiful togetherness. Cynicism abounds, but God has given us everything we need to demonstrate a better way. This is a tremendous opportunity for the church to testify to the difference Jesus makes.

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

As young people look at the church and decide if it offers a way of life worth following, we have the opportunity to develop a committed, loving community that they long to be part of—a community marked not by the wimpy, fickle love of a simple pop tune, but by love that holds on tight to one another and God.

In other words, The Colossian Way takes the simple truths we learned in Sunday school and offers an opportunity to practice living them out faithfully in our most pressured situations.

### 2.3. Our Goals

The goals of The Colossian Way should be revisited at the beginning of every session:

- **Gather Christians together.**
- **Practice loving God and neighbor while engaging difficult problems.**
- **Witness the body of Christ built up.**

#### Gather

In The Colossian Way, the first thing we aim to do is to gather Christians together. This may seem obvious, but all three words are important. First, this is a Christian practice. What we do makes little sense apart from a commitment to following Christ. Second, when we gather people, important differences and disagreements are inevitable. There will be difficult pressures in the room, even when we’re usually quite adept at keeping them hidden. Third, we gather together. We’re in this together. We belong together. We are going to work the challenges through, together.

#### Practice

The second goal also involves three things. As we *practice* love, we are going to *engage* difficult problems. This means facing into all of the difficulties as they really are, intentionally and purposefully. We don’t dodge what’s before us. We shouldn’t be surprised when difficult problems turn out to be difficult! But we are confident that it is good to face what we need to face.

Then, we’re committed to *loving* God and one another while we do this. It’s relatively easy to love one another while avoiding the tensions. In The Colossian Way, we intentionally engage and consciously pursue love.

Finally, this is a *practice*. Just as you can’t get up from the couch and run a marathon, you can’t engage and love without practice. We do this for ten sessions not only because there are a lot of topics to cover, but because we...
need to practice over and over again as we build habits for engaging and loving well.

Part of “practicing” this kind of love means getting it wrong. We may hurt one another. We may be insensitive. We may say the wrong things. We may skirt our responsibilities to one another. That’s why we need confession and forgiveness, and why we include these in every session. In God’s economy, nothing can go so wrong that it can’t be redeemed into something far better. Thanks be to God!

We succeed at this second goal when we can see among us true Christian love. This isn’t a gooey, saccharine love. It’s tough and resilient love. Paul’s words are worth reading again: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Witness

Finally, our third goal is to witness the way this love is building up the body of Christ. We so often fear these difficult problems and ignore them, hoping they will go away. We think engaging them will drive us apart and break our unity. We wrongly assume that we will live better together by avoiding the things we need to talk about.

But when we lean into the difficulties before us and practice love, we discover that our Christian community grows deeper, richer, stronger. It is more faithful and more like Christ. We hope to experience this during our time together.

Witnessing this building-up has a second side to it, too. We need to testify to what we see in our group. We will aim to tell the story of God’s faithfulness that we have experienced together, aim to share the good news of God’s life in our midst. As we love God and one another, we discover we have a story to share, a story that draws people to lives of discipleship.

Obeying the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:35-40) leads to fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). So, our third goal is to see for ourselves that the gospel “works,” even in the middle of our messes. And then, having seen it for ourselves, to share our story in such a winsome way that others will want to join us on the journey of faith.

These are the goals we keep before us as we journey along The Colossian Way. As with all Christian practices, we will regularly fail to reach our goals. That’s okay. We know what to do: be honest with God and with ourselves, pray for help, and try again!

2.4. Our Commitments

As we walk The Colossian Way, our joint commitments regularly come to the forefront. It’s helpful to look over this list from time to time. These commitments keep us centered on the deep things that undergird what we’re doing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>Since Jesus is Lord, we can be a people of sacrificial love and faith, rather than a people of fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>The body of Christ belongs together as a people of worship and hope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generations</td>
<td>Old and young build each other up by walking and talking together in faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>We accept divisive cultural issues as catalysts for faithfulness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>We are motivated by love of God and neighbor, especially when things get hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formation</td>
<td>Christ is making us into the people he longs for us to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism</td>
<td>We are empowered to share the reconciling good news of the gospel’s power today, especially in the midst of conflict.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here are some frequently asked questions regarding the ideas behind The Colossian Way. Answers can be found on the following pages.

Q1. The Colossian Forum claims we should listen to those we disagree with. Do you mean we should tolerate all views, even errors?

Listening to Christian brothers and sisters certainly helps us understand where they’re coming from. Often, we even start to sympathize with them. But what do we do after we start to understand someone we disagree with?

Many suggest that tolerance should be our goal. Difference is uncomfortable and inconvenient, but with tolerance we allow space for others to chart their own course. Tolerance preaches agreeing to disagree, leaving each other alone.

But The Colossian Forum believes that Christians are called to something much better—and more difficult—than tolerance. We belong to Christ and to each other. We share a common life, which Paul likens to a body (1 Corinthians 12). Many of our differences are intentionally given to us by the Holy Spirit so that we can build up Christ’s body (vv. 7, 11). Our differences aren’t inconveniences to be tolerated, but gifts for our overall good. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’” (v. 21) The eye doesn’t simply tolerate the hand. It loves and serves it.

But eyes think differently from hands. A healthy body coordinates its members across differences. We must listen in order to work together. Yet sometimes difference comes from one part really getting it wrong. The hand suffers if the eye is blind. “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (v. 26). If the hand is to help an ailing eye, it has to think like an eye. This is hard work—but it is our calling. The goal of Christ’s body is not tolerance of differences, but building up the body amid differences. So, we must listen.

Q2. Isn’t it dangerous for me to listen to error?

In Q1 above, we said that we aim for far more than tolerating those with whom we disagree: we aim to sacrificially love them. The next question follows naturally: Shouldn’t I protect myself from their error and keep far away?

Avoidance does make some sense. Christians are indeed vulnerable targets of various cunning agendas. We ourselves are weak, so we sometimes
We don't build walls against the erring. Instead, we dare to listen to and live with them as we embody Jesus for them.

To offer the gift of truth, you need to invest in true friendship.

To make progress, you need to offer a gift that can be received. But how can an outsider offer something positive?

To offer the gift of truth, you need to invest in true friendship. Prove yourself trustworthy. Patently learn the other’s language and culture. Wrestle honestly with their loves, hopes, and fears. If you’re a real friend—not just faking love—you just might be granted a moment to speak truth when your friend’s world is crumbling. Jesus and Paul walked alongside the lost and were able to speak truth in its time (Luke 7:34; 15:2; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23). An enemy will never have that opportunity.

Be prepared for raising the suspicions of your own group as you befriend outsiders. The Pharisees condemned Jesus. But if you want to be a channel of truth, count the cost and make the sacrifice of becoming a friend.

Q4. The Colossian Forum’s work with divisive issues assumes we are all Christians. What if that doesn’t seem to be true?

Most of the time, we clearly recognize one another as family in Christ as we pray, read Scripture, and work together on difficult issues. But then a question arises. Someone whispers, “Did you hear that? A real Christian wouldn’t say that.”

Now what? Do we take him at his word that he’s a Christian? What do we do with our doubt? It wouldn’t be honest or loving to overlook the concern. This is an issue of being part of Jesus’ kingdom after all.

In the preface to Mere Christianity, about such situations, C. S. Lewis writes that “it is much clearer to say he is a bad Christian than to say he is not a Christian.” Rather than jumping to exclude him from the circle of faith, shouldn’t we try to help him better live out the faith he confesses? Wouldn’t we each want the same when we inevitably do or say something out of step with our faith?

Sometimes the tension is so strong that the pointed question needs to be asked: “I don’t know how you can claim to be a follower of Jesus and say that. Can you explain?” This gets us talking about Jesus, which is good. That conversation usually leads to rediscovering a common family bond. But if not, we are duty-bound to pray for that individual all the more.

Q3. When my neighbor believes lies, doesn’t love compel me to speak the truth?

Yes! Surely love doesn’t let people sink into error. But are you speaking truth if you can’t be heard?

When a divisive issue arises, fear and anger mount. We band with the like-minded to reinforce and encourage ourselves. We build defenses against those who think differently.

If you try to cross this divide, much works against you. As an outsider you lack credibility. Your side’s language and reasoning are alien and difficult to understand. Cultural differences make your thoughtfulness and care come off as rude, illogical, and absurd. Finally, pointing out the other’s weaknesses accomplishes little because your own position is seen as even weaker.

Rather than jumping to exclude others from the circle of faith, shouldn’t we try to help them better live out the faith they confess?
A Real-Life Example

We were discussing homosexuality and tensions were high. Several forum participants were saying the Bible is clear and our Christian duty demands that we submit to its teaching.

For one person—scarred by a pastor who had claimed to know God’s mind and used it to harm others—a demand to submit to the facilitator’s interpretation of Scripture was a huge red flag. The concern came out as, “I don’t agree with your view of Scripture.”

Days later, the conflict resurfaced in private. “Submitting to Scripture is fundamental. A real Christian wouldn’t resist that.”

If these sides were to come together and share stories, they’d recognize they are both straining to resist evil—an evil of disregarding God’s revelation and an evil of preying on the vulnerable. Moving from fear to faithful Christian love, even for weathered Christian leaders, requires a willingness to enter frightening places by listening with humility and patience, and the courage to speak honestly. We can’t afford the easy path of assuming, accusing, and distancing. Especially behind the other’s back.

An exercise: Think of someone you care about who claims the name of Christ yet behaves or speaks in ways that seem to contradict it. First, be sure you’ve walked alongside them long enough that they know you love them. Then, pray about humbly exploring this apparent contradiction together.

Q5. Why open up divisive issues? Shouldn’t we let sleeping dogs lie?

We developed The Colossian Way to build disciples and witnesses by engaging divisive questions. The idea has been received enthusiastically, but also cautiously. After all, divisive issues can be...divisive. Some ask, “Why intentionally kick a hornet’s nest? Asking those questions could split our church.”

Yes, asking hard questions can be risky, but we all know that it’s worth taking some prudent risks to grow faith. We send youth on mission trips in order to stretch young faith, reveal God in new ways, and set up patterns of service that will last a lifetime. We send out our young people, knowing they are taking measured risks, but also knowing that the benefits are well worth it.

Likewise, it can be risky to open up difficult questions at church. It can be stretching and intense. It moves people out of their comfort zones, where reliance upon God becomes less of an option and more of a necessity. It forms disciples more deeply and settles them more firmly in their convictions.

Isn’t this backwards? Don’t pressured, controversial questions unsettle us, especially when we can’t find an easy path through the division?

In some ways, yes; but easy answers to truly complex questions are usually wrong. We float along, naively trusting the simple answers that go down smoothly. We assume the other side is worldly or deluded. We live in a fantasyland where our position has no problems. This leaves us vulnerable to disillusionment when we discover things aren’t as simple as we imagined.

In order to move from gut opinion to settled, wise judgment, we need to do the hard work of facing into the complexity of the issues. We need to do this together, so that our different God-given gifts can complement one another. We need to do it in love and unity and according to the pattern of the cross.

The apostle Paul describes what happens as a result: “We will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:14-15).

In developing The Colossian Way, we met with the leaders of a church that had already fallen apart over a divisive issue. As painful as their experience was, they didn’t say, “I wish we had never brought it up.” No, they joined The Colossian Way in order to dive more deeply into these questions, to seek God’s healing, and to prepare them for the difficult questions that will arise wherever God leads them next.

Is asking divisive questions risky? Yes, but don’t we want to grow into maturity?
Q6. Why does The Colossian Forum refer to engaging divisive issues as a spiritual practice?

Christian practices teach us to live differently. So, when the culture preaches relentless productivity and greed, we practice resting and giving. Such things don’t come naturally, but practice enables us—by the grace of God—to withstand the world’s pressures.

Spiritual practices are ways of living out Paul’s command “to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires ... and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24). Putting off the old requires many tiny choices. Paul’s first example is to “put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor” (v. 25). This isn’t a one-and-done thing, but a steady, lifetime practice.

Spiritual practices like prayer, Scripture study, solitude, fasting, and hospitality aren’t meant to be mere duties, but “patterns of communal action that create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy, and presence of God may be made known to us” (Craig Dykstra, Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices, p. 66). God transforms us through such practices.

Beyond the traditional practices, it’s helpful to look at our current age to see how we’re being malformed into a body that doesn’t fit Christ our head (Colossians 1:18). For example, in our mobile world, we think little of leaving our local church to take a job in another city. But some Christians practice stability: sticking with their churches over the long-haul. They are challenging our relationally unstable world. John Alexander suggests “finding core sins of the surrounding cultures and creating forms that confront them well … by pointing in more life-giving directions. … In that way we can point the world toward hope” (Being Church: Reflections on How to Live as the People of God, p. 149).

So, what does this mean for how Christians engage divisive issues? The culture of the world has become increasingly polarized and outraged, losing its shared vision and the ability to work together. Many have lost hope. While we Christians have plenty of things that divide us, Jesus invites us to engage these things in life-giving, countercultural ways.

So instead of winning points with clever debate rhetoric, we can make honest, charitable, and humble arguments, while learning from others’ arguments. Instead of entering dialogues where all views are equal, we can listen compassionately, build strong bonds of covenant loyalty across differences, and challenge one another to live faithfully (Hebrews 10:24). Instead of cheering when our opponent goofs, we cheer most loudly (and give thanks most gratefully) when the fruit of the Spirit emerges in our midst: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). This is our peculiar idea of winning.

We become what we practice. So, as we face into the issues of our day, our desire is to do so in a distinctively Christian way.

Q7. When people disagree, what is there to talk about?

One prospective Colossian Forum participant put it this way: “What will we do after I say my piece, he says I’m wrong, then he says his piece, and I say he’s wrong?” Nobody wants to repeat the same, tired arguments yet again.

Or worse, what about when there is absolutely nothing to talk about? “Evolution is established reality so stop saying it isn’t.” “The Bible clearly says homosexual activity is evil so I’m not listening.” End of story. No more discussion. What then?

Beyond deadlocked arguments, these are seemingly inescapable mires of incomprehensibility. But we serve the Lord who demolishes dividing walls (Ephesians 2:14). Crossing the rubble of the demolition begins by desiring to see things—if even for a moment—through the other’s eyes. Or even to feel the weight of what so convinces the other. This moves us toward the truth.

It is the way of Jesus, who walked alongside Pharisees, tax collectors and prostitutes. He brought them new life exactly where they were, but he didn’t leave them there. Jesus invited people into his world by painting pictures of his kingdom that made sense in their world.
Entering another’s world demands firm rootedness in one’s own. Open-mindedness to others is not intellectual laziness or confusion. Rather, it sets oneself aside for a moment to care for another. And so we imitate Christ: “Value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).

Talking in Colossian Way groups isn’t just about transferring information. It’s about investing in one another in ways that kindle shared desire for truth, shared yearning for friendship, and shared devotion to Jesus.

Since these things are far beyond our grasp, we ask for God’s help— together. “Please open our eyes and our hearts to one another,” we sometimes beg. Only then may we voice our frustration: “How can you think the way you do?” An honest question seeking an honest answer. Now we’re talking.

There’s no magic for entering another’s world. It’s like any new friendship. We ask each other’s story. “How did you come to faith? What kind of church shaped you? When have you doubted? How have you suffered?”

We talk about what we fear will go wrong if the other side wins. We talk about why we think the other is damaging the church and what we admire about each other. We pray for each other. And, yes, we talk about the complex questions and challenges that divide us.

After we talk, we need to return to prayer. We give thanks for being drawn closer to God and one another. We repent of how we’ve wronged God and one another. We voice our hope that God will continue to hold all things together (Colossians 1:17).

It’s hardly rocket science, but that’s the kind of talking across difference that keeps drawing us back for more.
SUPPLEMENTAL CONTENT

We’ve augmented each session with videos and printed supplements that foster group interaction and in-depth exploration of the topic. The group watches the videos together then discuss the issues and themes the videos address.

Session 1: Political Conflict
“Setting the Goals” tcway.org/pt1unity

SUPPLEMENTAL CONTENT

Session 1: Political Conflict
“Political Conflict” tcway.org/pt1engage

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