



# Community Group Discussion Guide

Thankful for You  
August 20, 2023 | Colossians 1:3-8

## MOTIVATE

*Starter Question:*

⇒ *Can you name and describe why you are thankful for a specific person?*

*Optional Activity: Create a “graffiti board” in your room by using the whiteboard or by taping a poster board to a focal wall. Supply appropriate markers. Ask your group members to write down the name of a believer for whom they are thankful. Read off some of the names and allow the individuals who wrote the name to describe why he or she is thankful for this person.*

⇒ *Why is it good for us to express our thankfulness to and for other believers?*

## DISCUSS

After Paul’s typical opening to his letters (Colossians 1:1-2), he often followed next with an expression of thanksgiving for the church he was addressing as well as assurance that he regularly prayed for them. Although Paul most likely never visited the Colossian church, he knew of their Christian experience and was thankful for them.

**Colossians 1:3-5a** We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5a because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

⇒ *How meaningful must it have been to the Colossians to know Paul was always thankful to God for them?*

⇒ *Why is it vital that we have spiritual leaders who pray for us?*

Before taking on the false teaching that threatened the Colossian believers, Paul thanked God for three positive areas of growth in their spiritual lives. While we tend to focus on Paul in his letters, it’s good to remember that Timothy was a part of Paul’s communication to the Colossians (see Colossians Overview).

1. Their faith in Christ Jesus: Paul referred to their belief and trust in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as the means of their salvation. They proved their faith by acting on what they believed.

⇒ *Why must faith be acted upon?*

2. Their love for all the saints: Paul commended them for the way their faith in the gospel was proven through tangible displays of love, particularly for others in the faith. They proved their love through their acceptance of all people regardless of race, nationality, or social class. As should be true of all believers in Christ, their actions were aimed at improving the welfare of others.

⇒ *What are some of the unique qualities of the love Christ produces in His followers?*

- ⇒ ***Consider how this relates to one of Henderson Hills’ values: Compelling Love: We demonstrate the love of Jesus by respecting the dignity of every person, sacrificing for our neighbors, and cultivating unity in our faith family.***

3. Their hope laid up in heaven: Paul noted that they had genuine faith and active love because of their certainty of what the gospel promises: complete redemption and a glorious future secured by Christ in heaven. Hope is the confident expectation that God will fulfill all of His promises. Hope anticipates future blessing through His guarantee of grace.

- ⇒ ***Why do faith and love spring from hope?***  
 ⇒ ***What future spiritual blessing do you anticipate today? What difference does this hope make in your daily life?***

**Colossians 1:5b-6** Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,

- ⇒ ***Why did Paul twice emphasize the word truth in these verses?***  
 ⇒ ***How does worldwide reception of the gospel testify to its truth and power?***  
 ⇒ ***How does the gospel’s effect verify its truth?***

The sowing of a seed was a fixed metaphor in Scripture for something God would do. The growth of fruit from a seed was considered the wondrous, mysterious work of God, not simply the result of the law of nature. The seed holds within itself the secret of its growth by an appointed order of development that cannot be hurried or skipped over, nor can it be delayed. This sequence assumes that whatever has transpired under the ground will become visible.

- ⇒ ***How does this metaphor illustrate the truth of the gospel and grace of God?***

Paul pointed out that evidence of Christ-like character and a spiritual life was demonstrated in the Colossians because of their faith, hope, and love. This was proof that, against all odds, the seed of the gospel was doing what it was designed to do in their lives and around the world. This gives testimony to the truth of God’s Word.

- ⇒ ***Can you give an example of the fruit of faith? Of hope? Of love?***

God’s gospel message is designed to bear fruit in believers and to grow all over the world—just as Jesus said it would. The false teachers at Colossae were telling these new believers that evidence of salvation and spirituality were found in keeping rules, being initiated into secret knowledge, or having ecstatic experiences.

Paul encouraged the Colossians to remain faithful to the message of truth they heard and not be seduced into error by false teaching. Salvation came to the Colossians because of God’s grace through Jesus. These new believers needed to know what truth was before they could recognize what was false.

- ⇒ ***Compare and discuss these “formulas” you’ve written on a white board in your room or on a small poster board:***

- *Jesus = Salvation*
- *Jesus + \_\_\_\_\_ = Salvation*

This message of grace, when adequately understood, takes root in the heart and bears fruit. The gospel should do for us what it did for the Colossians. The gospel of Jesus Christ, like a seed, is a universal and dynamic force that impacts the hard soil of sin and takes root as new life. Just like a rich harvest of grapes is evidence of life in the seeds from which they sprang, so the seed of the gospel bears fruit that proves there is spiritual life.

⇒ *Can you describe a way the gospel of Jesus has born fruit in your life? Or in the life of another believer?*

**Colossians 1:7-8** just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

The gospel seed, which bears fruit in individual believers and grows all over the world, must be planted. God's plan is that those who have received the seed are to plant the seed. That was the case for the Colossians. The gospel came to them when they learned it from Epaphras. The gospel can only bear fruit successfully when people faithfully proclaim it and when others respond with understanding and obedience.

- ⇒ *From whom did you hear about the gospel of Jesus? How did this person plant the seed in your life?*
- ⇒ *How does God's gospel seed-bearing plan relate to Henderson Hills' mission to live sent and to be a disciple-making church?*

Paul's pattern of ministry was to equip new converts to spread the gospel in places where he could not go himself. It's possible that Epaphras founded the Colossians church. In these verses, Paul identified Epaphras as "a beloved fellow servant" and "a faithful minister of Christ." Paul clarified that he and Epaphras were united in their missionary efforts and that both served Christ.

⇒ *Who could you name as "a beloved fellow servant" or "a faithful minister of Christ?" Explain your answer.*

Epaphras came to Paul in prison with a good report on the spiritual progress of the Colossian believers. Part of that report was their mutual love, which refers to the love that is produced by the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Paul was speaking of the love Christians have for one another because of a shared relationship in Christ.

⇒ *What are unique characteristics of this type of love among believers?*

Paul's close association with Epaphras and Epaphras' close association with the Colossians is the connection that allowed the apostle to write this letter filled with encouragement and instructions.

- ⇒ *If someone were to give a good report about our Community Group, what might be said?*
- ⇒ *What instructions might be given?*

## TRANSFORM

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**1. Make personal application:** Paul pointed out three fundamental traits of Christian character that ought to be evident in the life of those in whom the gospel seed has taken root: faith, love, and hope. These should be increasingly evident if the seed is doing what it is designed to do.

- ⇒ *How is your faith?*
- ⇒ *How is your love?*
- ⇒ *How is your hope?*
- ⇒ *How can we ensure our Community Group exhibits these?*

**2. Pray:** Thank God for each other in specific ways. Use the example of how Paul showed his gratefulness for Epaphras. Praise God that He planted the seed of the gospel in your life and ask Him to help you to grow evidence of His grace in your life.

### STUDY: Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

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- *Holman New Testament Commentary, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians*, pages 278-280.
- *The NIV Application Commentary, Colossians and Philemon*, pages 39-63.
- *Shepherd's Notes, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, pages 41-42.