

FLOURISH

COMMUNITY GROUPS

Fall 2021



Colossians 1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. 3 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, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. 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, 7 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.

Now as we are getting started, we need to see how this little letter came to be written and how it teaches us about the life of the gospel. This church is unique in that Paul did not get it started. He's actually never even visited these people. Instead, the church was begun by a young man named Epaphras, a man that spent time with Paul. Paul has heard the news about this new church, how it was growing and flourishing. Colossae had been an important town in the empire at one time because of trade, but it had fallen on hard times. It was no longer important nor did it have a large population. Paul spent his time visiting the prominent cities of Asia Minor and this city did not even make the list.

But, as Epaphras came to faith in Christ and went to Colossae, the gospel went with him. Soon a growing fellowship of believers gathered. Here is a life sign of the gospel. People longed for fellowship with God and the door was opened through faith in Jesus. The church began to grow as people responded to the message of the gospel. Paul uses this gardening metaphor, one Jesus himself often used. Jesus spoke of the sower and the seed. He told the story of the mustard seed and the large bush that came from such a small seed. Here in Colossae we see this parable in living color. A small seed, one believer, starts a movement that soon everyone is hearing about. Paul heard about it while in prison in Ephesus. That's where he was when he wrote this letter.

Now, this gardening metaphor helps us envision how the gospel grows and bears fruit as was happening in this new young church. That's what we will be looking at in the days ahead.

Getting Started – feel free to share from one or more of these questions.

Are you a green thumb or a brown thumb? Share a story of how you nurtured a plant or a time when your care did not bring flourishing.

Would you say that in your spiritual life you are flourishing or struggling? Why do you feel this is the case?

In your life, when would you say that the seed of the gospel was first planted? Do you remember your first interest in Christ? How would you describe it? Why does that moment stand out to you?

What are you most passionate about in your life? How do you see your passion manifest in your actions?

Share a time in your life when you feel like you were thriving in your relationship with God. What do you think were the factors involved?

Thinking about Flourishing

Roots: The primary root, or radicle, is the first organ to appear when a seed germinates. It grows into the soil, anchoring the seedling. The taproot grows downward, and secondary roots grow laterally from it to form a taproot system. Root hairs form that absorb water and mineral nutrients from the soil.

We begin our study of how a plant can flourish by looking at the roots. The purpose of a root system is to anchor the plant, to provide it with stability and strength, to provide water and nutrients, and to be the channel for those resources. Without a healthy root system the plant cannot flourish. Our root system, the source of life for us, is found in Christ and his steadfast love.

Scripture Study - Colossians 1:13-23

What are the ways that God puts Jesus at the center of his plan to bring life to us and our world? How is Christ the root of all that we have in God? What do these mean?

He has delivered us...

He is the image of the invisible God...

All things were created by him...

He is before all things...

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead...

In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...

...through him to reconcile to himself all things...

Why is Christ at the root/center of God's plan to bring flourishing into our world?

What does Jesus reveal to us about God?

How is Jesus the blueprint for human life? What does he teach us about being human?

Application

What does this mean for us? How is Jesus the source of our flourishing life?

How can focusing our lives on Christ open to us a life of flourishing? Share a few ways you have seen Christ bring flourishing to your life.

How do we focus our lives on Christ? What is one thing you can do during the weeks ahead to root your life more deeply in Christ?

Prayer

Share any personal needs for prayer you are comfortable in sharing with your group. Use the prayer found below as the basis for your time of prayer.

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith –that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19

For Fun

Your group can adopt a plant to care for, to bring when you meet together, and to use to help with your discussion. If you really want to see a plant go through the stages of growth, take a cutting from a plant that you will grow and nurture. Get it started developing its own roots. If you do so, allow care for the plant to pass among the members of your group during the duration of our group series. Take a picture of your plant each week so that you can track how it is developing.

FLOURISH - Week #2 - The Blueprint

Getting Started – feel free to share from one or more of these questions.

What person's story (someone you have known personally) has most encouraged you in your life? What part of their story has had the greatest impact on you?

Who or what has most sustained your hope during the pandemic? How have you experienced this hope?

From your experience as a Christ-follower, what would you say to encourage a younger believer that is struggling? If you could only say two things, what would they be?

What tough time in your life have you most learned from? What did this time teach you?

Who do you most want to see come to the knowledge of the truth? Why this person?

Thinking about Flourishing

Plant DNA: Plants, like all known organisms, use DNA to pass on their traits. DNA provides the genetic code that determines how the plant will grow and what structure it will take, it is the blueprint for the plant's life.

What is the structure that a plant will take? It is based on its DNA, the instruction set that is found in every plant cell. The DNA determines how the plant will grow and how it will become mature and ultimately produce fruit. We have been given such a pattern and provision for maturity in Christ.

Scripture Study – Colossians 1:24-2:5

What are the sources of Paul's suffering? What is Paul most concerned about going into the future?

How has this flourishing life in Christ given Paul a sense of mission? What is the nature of his mission? What does he desire to see happen?

What is the hope of glory? What is the glory Paul is speaking about? How does our hope for glory come through Christ?

What is the mystery that he is speaking of that has been hidden for generations? Why does he want the church to know this? How can this knowledge help them/us?

Where are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden? How have the treasures been revealed and been made available?

In what sense, is our DNA, the instruction set and description of what we shall become, found in Christ? What are the signs of maturity in Christ?

If all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, our DNA, are hidden in Christ, how can you access them and benefit from them? How does this lead to a life of flourishing?

Application

How can you make practical the fact that Jesus is the source of your hope in life and death? How is this meant to affect the way we live?

How has the gospel given you a sense of mission in the world? What do you feel your mission is?

Prayer

Share any personal needs for prayer you are comfortable in sharing with your group. Use the prayer from this chapter in Colossians as the basis for your prayer for each other.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God... Colossians 1:9-10

For Fun

Have you given your plant a name? Who is keeping the plant this week? How is it doing? Is it flourishing? Have the roots begun to develop? Take another picture so that you can compare with how it looked last week.



Getting Started – feel free to share from one or more of these questions.

Share something you have recorded in your Colossians journal. What is something you have learned or a new observation you have had?

Share one turning point moment in your spiritual life. You may want to fill in the blank: I am not sure where I would be now if... (How has this moment shaped you?)

If you can remember when you were baptized, share how you remember it? How did this time come to affect you?

What was the time when you felt you were in the greatest danger during your life? How did you come through it?

What was the house like where you grew up? How did living there come to shape the person you have become?

Thinking about Flourishing

Plants grow and thrive: Plants draw up water and dissolved nutrients up from the soil through their roots, and control where they go throughout the plant by opening and closing those tiny stomata. The sticky nature of water molecules moves nutrients throughout the plan, but plants cannot live on air and water alone.

Our text for this week picks up the metaphor of a plant growing as we are said to be rooted and built up in him, that is Christ. Consider what it means for a plant to grow, to draw nutrients from its roots and then to develop and mature. But, there are also forces that can destroy a plant, as we learn in Jesus' parable of the sower. Today, we begin to see the dangers to our growth, those things that can keep us from fullness in our life in Christ.

Scripture Study – Colossians 2:6-15

Beyond receiving Christ as Lord, what do you think it means to be rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith? How does this take place in us?

Spend a few minutes speaking about the dangers to our growth in Christ. What do you think these dangers involve?

v. 8 ...*philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition-*

v. 14 ...*the record of debt that stood against us-*

v. 15 ...*the rulers and authorities-*

In each instance, what is the source of our protection? Why do you think this is the place that Paul reminds them about their baptism?

What does our baptism teach us about the source of our identity? How does baptism connect us to Christ and also to God's covenant?

What was our condition before we came to faith in Christ? How has everything changed for us by being united with Christ?

What did God do to the record of sins that stood against us? How did this serve to disempower the powers that stand against us?

Application

How can you see these things that Paul warned the church in Colossae about in his letter also at work around us? What other dangers have you encountered?

Looking over the short list from our study, what has most put your growth in Christ in danger? How did you experience this? How have you responded to it?

When have you been...

Pulled down with guilt over sin that would accuse you?

Under the control of elemental spirits of the world?

Finally, how can remembering your baptism, being buried and raised up with Christ, help you remember whose you are? What are practical ways you can remember your identity in Christ each day?

Prayer

Use your prayer time to pray for the protection of each other. Take the prayer below as the starter for your time of prayer.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:9-11

For Fun

Talk about what might keep your plant from growing. What would hinder growth? What would likely be fatal? What do you think would be the effect of neglect? Does someone in your group have a story of killing a houseplant through neglect? Remember to take a picture of your plant so that you can see its growth and progress.

Getting Started – feel free to share from one or more of these questions.

Did you grow up in a religious home or a non-religious one? How did your home life serve to shape the faith you have today?

What is one pet peeve you have? Why does this bother you?

Right now, who would you say are the people in your life that most support you in your faith? What do they do that supports you?

Is there a food or drink you have a weakness for? If so, what is it and why do you think you like it as much as you do?

When have you gotten yourself into the best shape you have ever been in? How did you do it, and how did it make you feel?

Thinking about Flourishing

Threats to Plants: In addition to sunlight, water, and proper temperature, plants need certain nutrients from the soil to grow. For example, plants need potassium for root development, nitrogen for healthy leaves, and phosphorus for flower development. Most plants require a balance of resources to maintain strength and to thrive. That means there can be too little or too much of what a plant needs. This will stress a plant and endanger its health.

This week we continue the conversation about what threatens our faith in Christ. What are those things that can hinder the growth of a plant, robbing it of vitality and fruitfulness? Actually, for a plant to thrive, it must have conditions for growth and increase. How can we protect the plant from danger and also promote flourishing?

Scripture Study – Colossians 2:16-23

Paul makes a list of what the church has been told will bring them spiritual vitality. He insists these things will not help them. Why do they hurt and not help?

Living for the approval of people-

Special diets-

Observing rituals and special days-

Asceticism-

Legalistic regulations-

What do these things promise to do for us? Why do they fall short?

In what sense are the things the world offers a “shadow” and how is Christ the substance? What does this mean?

What is the growth that comes from God? How is this growth different?

Application

When have you been drawn into legalism thinking that it was the source of growth and life for you? What did you learn in the process?

Why is living by grace nothing like living under the law? How can we know if we are living by grace?

In what practical ways can we hold fast to the head that is Christ so that we are not distracted and drawn away? How can we help each other in this as members of the body of Christ?

Prayer

Use the prayer below to guide your prayer time for each other. Thank God for providing in Christ all things you need for a life of faith and godliness.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-5

For Fun

Talk about the ways you can accelerate the growth of your plant. Will plant food help? Better sunlight? Better regulated water supply? Placing it in a different place (outside rather than inside)? Remember to take a picture of your plant so that you can see its growth and progress.

Getting Started – feel free to share from one or more of these questions.

What is something that has been tough to throw away, but you are glad you did? Why was it so difficult to throw away?

What from our study thus far has most stoked your passion for fullness in Christ? How will you apply this in your life?

What habit in your life has been most difficult to break? How are you doing with it now? Or, if you have broken this habit, how did you do it?

How would you describe yourself to someone during an elevator speech (usually 45 seconds or less)? What is most important to tell someone for them to know who you really are?

Thinking about Flourishing

Promoting plant health: Pruning removes dead and dying branches and stubs, allowing room for new growth and protecting your property and passerby from damage. It also deters pest and animal infestation and promotes the plant's natural shape and healthy growth.

Jesus in his explanation of the vine and the branches introduces the idea of pruning to us. Pruning is critical to the flourishing of a plant. Pruning requires cutting away the branches of a plant that hinder growth and the bearing of fruit. Pruning can be painful for us, but it is also life-giving. This pruning is an action of God's love in our lives.

Scripture Study – Colossians 3:1-11

What does it mean to have our lives hidden with Christ in God? Do you think this is protection or identity or both? Share what you think this means.

What do you think it means to die and be raised with Christ? How can our identity in Christ be made a mindset? How will our new mindset begin to change us?

What is the pruning, the putting to death, that needs to happen in our lives? Why does Paul say this needs to happen? What reasons does he give?

What is the old self that needs to be taken off and the new self that is to be put on? What do think it means to be “renewed in the knowledge of the image of your creator”? (v.10)

Why does our new identity in Christ call for old divisions between people to be done away with? (v. 11)

Application

How can we set our minds on Christ and live the new life God has called us to live? What has helped you most to live your new life?

Over the years, what has God called you to prune away so that you could produce fruit? What are some things that used to be part of your life but are no more? Or, what are things that are part of your life now that weren't then?

How have you seen Christ change your perspective of other people? What "Scythians" has Christ taught you to love and welcome?

Prayer

Use Paul's prayer of gratitude for the church in Corinth as the basis for your prayer. What gives Paul confidence in their future? Let your prayer be one of thanks to God for the sufficient grace of Jesus.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

For Fun

This week you should have your fifth picture. Check to see the difference between your first week and this week. How is your group plant doing? Do you see noticeable growth? Is it thriving? Can you pass it along to another member of your group for the next week? For next week: Ask the members of your group to bring their favorite fruit to share.

Getting Started – feel free to share from one or more of these questions.

At what time(s) in your life have you grown most spiritually? What was special about that/those time(s)?

In what area(s) of your life do you think you most need to grow? What do you think will most support this growth in you?

What people (that you know personally) have most displayed spiritual maturity and fruitfulness to you? What does maturity look like?

How have your life goals changed through the years? What is a goal that you used to have that you no longer have?

Thinking about Flourishing

Fruits and plants: plants grown from seed will usually bear fruit. However, there are some factors to consider depending on the type of plant you are growing. While annual plants will produce fruit the first year from seeds, some fruit trees may not bear fruit for 5 to 15 years after the seed has been planted.

All flowering plants produce fruit. The fruit reflects the health of the plant and also provides for more plants in the future. But, this is not the only sign that a plant is flourishing. New growth of various kinds will be evident as well. Branches will spread out and reach up, and root systems will become more robust and healthy. These signs also begin to show up in those that are in Christ.

Scripture Study – Colossians 3:12-17

What are the signs of a growing and thriving follower of Christ? Why is love what must bind all the others together?

How are these life signs possible for us? Where do they come from and how do we come to live in this way?

Why do you think Paul uses the metaphor of putting on clothes to describe how we come to live our new life in Christ? He makes it sound easy; is it? Why or why not?

How does the community support us in our new life? What “one anothering” are we called to do? Why can we not live this life on our own?

What is the driving motivation for all that we do?

Application

How can we “one another” right here in our group? When have you seen this happening here?

In the world in which we live, how do people measure success and fruitfulness? How does this compare with the way God measures it?

Spend a few minutes with your group expressing gratitude to God for specific things in your life or answers to prayer. Be sure to include aspects of your group and your group time.

Prayer

Use your prayer time to give thanks to God. Below is another prayer from scripture to use to provide form for your prayer.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. 2 Thessalonians 1:3

For Fun

Share the fruit your group brought to the meeting. Can you see the seeds and the nourishment provided in the fruit for the seeds to germinate and grow. Remember to take a picture of your group plant. Is your plant thriving? Growing? Can you see signs of health?

FLOURISH - Week #7 - Seeing Growth

Getting Started – feel free to share from one or more of these questions.

Where was your first job? What did you learn about yourself? What did your first job teach you about what you wanted or didn't want to do in the future?

What was it like where you grew up? How did your parents relate to each other? Was your home a home of law or grace or both? Tell your group members a little about it.

Share with your group a little about your job now (or your most recent position). Have you found it draining or life-giving or both? How so?

What was your relationship like with your father? How do you feel this has shaped your life and also the way you see God? How about your relationship with your mother?

Thinking about Flourishing

Flowering plants multiply: At the top of the stem, a flower bud might begin to form (if it is a flowering plant). Eventually the flower bud will open up, or bloom, into a flower. New seeds will grow inside of the flower. Eventually those new seeds will fall to the ground or be planted by a human and grow into new plants!

This week we think a little more about the way plants grow and what benefits they offer as they thrive. As Jesus shares the parable of the mustard seed, he said: It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. What are the benefits that spring from a plant that is thriving? We have learned about fruit and growth. What others can you think of? What other fruit do you see come from God's people when they are flourishing?

Scripture Study – Colossians 3:12-4:1

In each sphere of life, Paul explains the order and the grace that flows from a flourishing life. Take a moment and recount both:

Order

Grace

Marriage

Husband

Wife

Parenting

Children

Fathers/Parents

Work

Slaves

Masters

Everyone

What pulls this section of the text together? What brings about these changes in the way people relate to one another in the most important human relationships? (Hint: Where do you see the Lord mentioned in the text?)

Do you think this is an endorsement of slavery among God's people? How do we know this is not true?

Why do we look for the fruit of our life in Christ in our most basic relationships?

Do you think this is an endorsement of slavery among God's people? How do we know this is not true?

Why do we look for the fruit of our life in Christ in our most basic relationships?

Application

How do you see the need for order in your relationships? For grace? What happens when one or the other is missing?

How can we apply these biblical truths today where we live and work? (Respond in the most concrete and specific ways you can.)

Where are the areas in your life that you personally need to work on gospel application?

Prayer

Use the scripture below to finish your prayer time. Pray with the knowledge that God has given you his grace and that you will arrive safely at the end before the face of God. Pray for each other going forward.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:4-8

For Fun

Make your last observations about your group plant. How does it look? What has happened over the last weeks? Choose someone in your group to keep your plant as the group series comes to an end.



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