



October 20 – November 24, 2024

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Week 1: A Letter to Those in Christ

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which surprised you, or with which you disagreed?
2. Imagine you were a follower of Jesus in 60 CE in a cosmopolitan city like Colossae. What would you want to see in your church community? How is that similar or different to what you want from our church community today?
3. If the apostle Paul wrote a letter to Cedar Ridge Community Church, what do you think he would say?
4. Read Colossians 1:1-8. What is Paul thankful for, and what does this tell us about what he considers important?
5. How do you see faith, hope, and love related in your own life?
6. Read Colossians 1:9-14. Paul prays for many different things for the followers of Jesus in Colossae. Which of these do you most want to pray for yourself, and why? If you are meeting in a group, take some time to share your answer and then pray for one another. If you are reflecting alone, talk to God about this.

Practice for the week: Grace and Peace

Grace and peace to you from God our Father. (Colossians 1:2b, NIV)

Receive this blessing at the beginning of each day this week.

- Take a moment to repeat this short verse to yourself a couple of times.
- Think about the grace you have received: the people who have been patient with you when you were not at your best, and those who have forgiven you when you let them down.
- Think about the grace you can extend to others: those you will interact with today who need an extra dose of kindness, patience, forgiveness, and encouragement.
- Sit quietly, allowing your heart to open to God's presence.
- Whether or not you feel it, God is with you and for you. Like a perfect mother or father, God's love is unconditional and endless.
- Receive God's grace and peace.

Week 2: The Lordship of Christ

1. The title of this series is *Christ is Enough*. How does the phrase resonate with you personally? Is there anything about it that you find challenging or difficult to understand in light of current events?
2. Read Colossians 1:15-20, paying attention to Paul's use of the word "all." What conclusions can you draw from the way he uses this word? What practical implication does it have for how you apply this passage to your life?
3. Senator Raphael Warnock said, "A vote is a kind of prayer for the world we desire for ourselves and for our children, and our prayers are stronger when we pray together!" What do you think about this statement? Have you ever thought about voting that way?
4. Read Matthew 25:31-46. How do you understand Jesus' focus on the "least of these"? According to this passage, who should be included in our work for righteousness (a biblical word that can also be translated as justice)?
5. How does Matthew 25:31-46 challenge the way you think about pursuing justice in your own life? Where do you see the brokenness of the world most clearly, and how might Jesus be calling you to respond?
6. On Sunday, the speaker quoted Omid Safi, a professor of Islamic Studies at Duke University, saying, "We have to recover a gritty, grounded type of hope in this age of trauma." What practical steps can you take to recover this kind of hope?

Practice for the week: Box Breathing

Box Breathing is a breathing technique that helps calm anxiety and focus your mind and body by using steady, measured breaths. It involves inhaling, holding, exhaling, and pausing in equal counts, like moving along the four sides of a box. This simple practice can bring peace, clarity, and a sense of God's presence, helping us release stress and center ourselves in hope.

This week, take a few moments each day to practice box breathing, a simple technique to center yourself in God's presence and find peace.

Below are the steps for this practice:

- **Inhale** slowly for a count of 4, focusing on God's love filling you.
- **Hold** your breath for a count of 4, resting in God's presence.
- **Exhale** slowly for a count of 4, releasing any worries or burdens.
- **Pause** for a count of 4, recognizing God's peace within and around you.

Repeat this practice for a few rounds to feel more grounded and connected to God's hope and presence.

Week 3: The Sufficiency of Christ

1. How has the presidential election outcome impacted you emotionally and psychologically? How have you been able to process your thoughts and feelings? What has been helpful and what has been difficult? How has all this impacted your faith journey?
2. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
3. Read Colossians 1:15-20. What implications does this passage have for followers of Jesus with respect to engagement in issues and actions that might be called "political"?
4. Read Colossians 2:13-15. What does this passage say about the nature of God? How might this help us face our fears?
5. In the above passage the writer describes Jesus' crucifixion as a triumph. How do you relate to this? In what way could something so awful be seen as a triumph and why? What is actually triumphing and how? What "powers and authorities" do you think the writer is referring to?
6. Read Colossians 2:16-23. The writer is saying that God's love and our union with Christ mean that we don't have to perform to meet religious rules or have special knowledge or experiences. Christ is already enough. Have there been times when you have (from self-pressure or the pressure of others) been under the burden of religious performance? Are there any ways in which you feel that now? Have you ever felt "special" or superior to others because of your own religious or political beliefs and views? Are there any ways in which you feel that now? How might this passage help us let go of these things?
7. A big theme in this letter (and many of the writings in the Christian Scriptures) is the mystery of being "in Christ" based on the life we experience through the risen Christ. Break into smaller groups of 2 or 3 (or stay together as a larger group if that feels appropriate) and each share about your own experience (and struggle to experience) the risen Christ in your own life? Then spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week:

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Colossians 2: 9-10 (NIV)

This week, take a moment of quiet each day to read and meditate on the above words. Consciously invite the fullness of God to fill you. Throughout your day as you encounter the various "powers and authorities" of life (in family, work, religion, politics, and all kinds of relationships) mindfully embrace the reality of this passage—that you are "in Christ", that Christ is love, and that there is no higher power.

Week 4: Living in Christ

1. Was there anything in the message on Sunday that stood out to you? What was most helpful for you? Did anything stretch your thinking? Was there anything you found challenging?
2. Read Colossians 3:1-11, and consider the following:
 - How does Paul use the word “earthly” in this passage?
 - What do you think he means when he tells the Colossians to set their hearts and mind on the things above?
 - What does “Christ is all, and is in all” (v. 11) mean?
 - What are the implications for how we engage in issues in society?
3. Reflect for a moment: is there an area of your own life where you have “died to your old self”?
4. Read Colossians 3:12-17. Which of these virtues do you struggle with the most? How can you practice these more intentionally?
5. What does it mean to forgive “as the Lord forgave us”? How realistic is this?
6. Read Colossians 3:18-4:1. This passage (among others) has been used to justify slavery and patriarchy. How might it have been understood by the church in first-century Colossae? What does this passage teach about human dignity and worth?
7. Paul tells the Colossians to be thankful (v. 15) and to sing to God with gratitude (v. 16). What are you grateful for right now?

Practice for the week: Guarding our speech

But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and obscene language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices. (Colossians 3:8-9)

Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips. (Psalm 141:3)

Begin each day this week with Psalm 141:3 as a prayer. As you go through your day, pay particular attention to the words you speak. Do they reflect the “earthly” perspective of your old self, or the reality of being “in Christ” and knowing that “Christ is all, and is in all”? Talk to God about this.

Week 5: Together in Christ

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything that made you uncomfortable or with which you disagreed?
2. In Colossians 4:2, Paul writes to the Colossians: "Devote yourselves to prayer."
 - Read these two other passages where Paul encourages the church to pray: Romans 12:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Practically, what do you think Paul is encouraging the church to do?
 - How has prayer helped you see the brokenness in the world or become more aware of injustice? What role does prayer play in helping you align your life with God's purposes?
 - Jesus often withdrew to pray. How can you create space in your life for this kind of intentional prayer?
3. The second thing Paul encourages the church to do in Colossians 4:2 is to be watchful (literally "stay awake").
 - Why do you think it's tempting to look away from the brokenness in the world? Is this something you are prone to doing? How can we resist this temptation?
 - How can our church embody Paul's call to be watchful and stay engaged with the challenges of our community? How do you practice this in your daily life?
 - How does being watchful shape the way we respond to injustice or suffering?
4. In Colossians 4:2, Paul often connects prayer with thankfulness.
 - Why do you think gratitude and prayer go together?
 - How has practicing gratitude helped you resist despair or hopelessness in your life?
 - What are some small ways you can cultivate gratitude in your daily routine?
 - In what ways does gratitude help us see God's goodness even in difficult times?

Practice for the week: Cultivating Gratitude

Gratitude isn't just a practice—it's a way of seeing God's presence in the world and in your life. This week's practice is intended to deepen your connection to God, to others, and to the hope we have in Christ. Below are four short exercises that you can do this week to practice gratitude as a way of grounding yourself in God's goodness and resisting despair. Choose one from the list, or do all four. At the end of the week, reflect on the experience. Take note of how you feel and any thoughts you have about practicing gratitude in this season.

Option 1: Start Your Day with Gratitude

- Each morning, take a few minutes to reflect on three things you're grateful for. These can be big or small—something as simple as a good night's sleep, a friend's encouragement, or the gift of a new day. Write them down if you can.

Option 2: Take a Gratitude Walk

- Choose one day this week to take a short walk—around your neighborhood, in a park, or even just in your backyard. As you walk, disconnect from your phone and the news. Take notice of your surroundings—the beauty of nature, the sounds of life, and the goodness of creation. Use this time to thank God for what you see, hear, and feel.

Option 3: Name the Small Blessings

- At the end of each day, reflect on your day's events. What moments brought you joy? Where did you experience God's presence? Write down at least three small blessings from the day—things that may have gone unnoticed in the rush of life. Thank God for these moments, recognizing His hand at work in your everyday life.

Option 4: Share Gratitude

- Find a moment to express gratitude to someone this week. Write a thank-you note, send an encouraging message, or simply tell them in person how much they mean to you. Let your gratitude inspire someone else to see the goodness in their life.