

THE  
**COLOSSIAN**  
FORUM™



**Midterm Election Resource**

**Facilitator Guide**



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AN ADAPTATION OF



Material in these three sessions is drawn from The Colossian Way Political Talk curriculum.

[www.colossianforum.org](http://www.colossianforum.org)

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	Welcome to The Colossian Way .....	2
SESSION 1	Questions of Curiosity.....	5
SESSION 2	Anger — Fear — Love .....	13
SESSION 3	Political Enemies .....	21
HANDOUTS	Participant Handouts .....	34

## Welcome to The Colossian Way

First, thanks for taking on this responsibility!

Material in these three sessions are drawn from [The Colossian Way Political Talk curriculum](#), which consists of ten 90-minute sessions, typically done in groups of 10–14 participants. Political Talk offers practices and perspectives to help counter polarizing impulses and to maintain and strengthen relationships — among Christians and in all areas of our lives. The sessions in this packet of materials have the same intent, and your conscientious facilitation will help make that possible.

In no particular order, here are some basic facts, instructions, and suggestions to help your facilitation work.

- While these sessions maintain the same structure as a Political Talk session, they have been streamlined to 60 minutes.
- As with a typical Colossian Way session, there are five parts: Start, Unity, Prayer, Engage, and Godward.
- We have provided a facilitator’s script that you can simply read, if that seems best. That said, if you’re comfortable doing so, feel free to adapt and improvise. You know what will communicate best with your group.
- Experience teaches that reading materials well in advance and giving yourself time to reflect is valuable preparation for facilitating effectively.
- There is a video in each session (two videos in the third session).
  - Previewing it will help you process it with your group.
  - Having it cued up prior to the session can save a lot of frustration!
- In your facilitation materials, text comes in three main forms.
  - Plain text is mostly for you to read, although you may want to assign parts of it to others in the group.
  - Italicized text indicates an instruction for you. For example, *Read the question at the top of the text box to your group, pausing to let it sink in, then continue reading the text.*
  - A text box indicates material that also appears in the participants’ handouts.
- There are participant handouts with information, Scripture readings, and prayers for group members to follow along during each session and take notes as applicable.
- On the following page, there is an initial introduction to the three sessions in this packet. You may want to start each session by referencing this introduction, in case your group changes significantly or if you want to use it as a means to establish ground rules for conversation.

## Introduction

The vision of The Colossian Forum is to nurture a Christian community that acts Christian, especially in the face of conflict. That can be a challenge at any time, and not least in the run-up and aftermath to what is sure to be a contentious election. The three sessions in this packet, drawn from The Colossian Way Political Talk curriculum, introduce some practices and perspectives that can help Christians act Christian in our polarized society. We are focused especially on ways that people can maintain healthy relationships with others who think and voted differently than them.

The Colossian Forum seeks to orient its work to the North Star of loving God and loving neighbor. Our standard of success is whether our programs result in an increase in the Fruit of the Spirit and a decrease in the works of the flesh. Toward these ends, Colossian Forum materials are grounded in basic Biblical elements of our shared Christian faith, and the practices we develop give form and expression to common Christian virtues. In this spirit, we offer these three sessions.

As we begin our work together, I want to say something about our group's dynamic. We want to be able to speak honestly and vulnerably with one another here. It's important that we are 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.

*Invite comments from your group.*

## Session Structure

Sessions follow a common structure, inviting the group to **Start** by welcoming each other and praying an invocation and confession together. Christian **Unity** is strengthened through spiritual teachings and practices that connect with each topic. It may seem odd at first to pause for **Prayer** in the middle, but this helps us remember how Christ holds all things together, including our group. When we **Engage** the issues, we apply what we learned during the Unity phase. We end every session by turning **Godward** to offer our praises, laments, and hopes.

<b>START</b>	Introduce the session's topic, connecting with one another and with God.
<b>UNITY</b>	Learn a spiritual lesson or practice that will be applied to the session topic in the Engage phase.
<b>PRAYER</b>	In the middle of each session, pause to reconnect with God by praying a Scripture together.
<b>ENGAGE</b>	Dig deep into a challenging issue together, in Christian UNITY that is girded with PRAYER.
<b>GODWARD</b>	Reflect to God our praises, our laments, and our hopes.

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

We hope this facilitator guide provides what you need to lead your group fruitfully. Please reserve some time to read the guide prior to your group's meeting, think through the activities, and prayerfully reflect 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!

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## Midterm Election Resource Facilitator Guide

Session 1

Questions of Curiosity

## Start (5 minutes)

Both this first session and the second one address the way political polarization poisons our ability to talk to each other, then feeds on the resulting discord. We can have better conversations!

We 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.

*Read the question at the top of the text box to your group, pausing to let it sink in, then continue reading the text.*

### 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. These three pre-election exercises focus 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.

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. This first session introduces a simple practice for making better conversations possible, as always with Colossian Way materials, in the context of worship and prayer.

Could someone read the goals of The Colossian Way for us?

### Goals of The Colossian Way

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

In the Unity section, a video by Rob Barrett will open up the significance of these three goals. First, however, please join me in prayer.

### 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)



## Unity (15 minutes)

### 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. 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. You may want to take some notes.

### Video

*Watch the video: "Setting the Goals" (5 minutes)*

[tcway.org/pt1unity](http://tcway.org/pt1unity)

### What's "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 Colossian Way materials, 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 think about what we feel is falling apart in politics, what we feel needs healing, where we are hoping for peace. There are some prompts in your handout to help guide you. 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 handout, 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.*

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?

## Prayer (8 minutes)

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. 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, then close with prayer.

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

*After a brief pause, read Colossians 1:15–20 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 for Participants to share what struck them from the Scripture passage, then lead a brief closing prayer or ask someone else to pray.*

## Engage (24 minutes)

### The Problem: Conversations Gone Wrong

Probably most of us can tell stories of conversations about politics that went badly. Perhaps participants talked past each other. Maybe one or both exploded in judgmental assertion. Perhaps one froze in the face of the other's certainty. Participants likely walked away feeling some combination of confusion, hurt, anger, and distance from the other person.

To work at better conversations, let's start by recognizing the problem. Being careful not to betray any confidences, think of a story you can tell about political polarization working to undermine relationships and separate people. We'll then share those stories in small groups of three or four.

*Give participants a minute or two to think of a story, then divide them into groups of three or four.*

You have about 5 minutes in your groups. Give time for each person share their story briefly, then decide together on the story you want to tell the whole group.

*5 minutes may seem a little long or not at all sufficient, so you may want to adjust the time a little bit. Let participants know when their time is about half done, and remind them to make sure to hear all voices.*

Let's get back together and hear those stories in the whole group.

*Give each group a minute or two to tell the story they have chosen. After each one, invite questions of clarification from the rest of the group.*

Having heard these stories, do you think of things that might have made these conversations go better?

*Do this popcorn style — don't get into discussion at this point. If nothing comes to mind for them, that's fine.*

### Practice: Questions of Curiosity

The practice we're going to consider for making better conversations possible is asking Questions of Curiosity. Think about how polarized conversations often work: someone makes a statement we disagree with, and, if we're going to respond at all, it feels natural to push back by stating our own position. But claim and counter-claim on contentious topics are rarely the basis for good conversation. Much more likely, they lead to anger, maybe even contempt, followed by rejection and separation. Things can spiral out of control so quickly.

But what if, instead of responding to what provokes us by pushing back with a counter assertion, we changed the dynamic of confrontation by asking questions, by being curious about the other person?

The questions in your handout are just samples, of course, and when you adopt the practice of asking Questions of Curiosity, you will soon become adept at asking the questions that are just right for a particular situation.

Political polarization is the kind of problem that has no guaranteed fix, there are no surefire techniques for preventing damage. Nonetheless, you can see how asking questions of curiosity opens up entirely different possibilities than simply pushing back with a counter blast. Or walking away.

Let's go back to the stories of conversations gone wrong that we've been telling each other. Do we see any way that asking questions of curiosity might have helped the situation? What questions might we have asked?

*Give a few minutes for groups to answer these questions, then invite comments from the groups to the whole group.*

What questions of curiosity have you come up with? How would they have worked in your situation?

*If you've got enough time, this discussion can go as long as seems natural. A question you might throw into the mix is, "As you think about applying Questions of Curiosity, are any other methods for promoting positive conversations coming to mind?"*

### Daily 60-Second Practice

A core conviction of The Colossian Forum is that Christian virtues need to take the form of practices, and the practices need to become habits. Toward that end, Colossian Way materials include a Daily 60-Second Practice, a way of applying what we've been working on in our session. Today's 60-second practice is:

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. You could even just talk back to the radio or television!



## Godward (5 minutes)

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.

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?

*Allow a minute or so for hopes to be spoken.*

God has been listening, so we don't need to repeat all of these praises, laments, and hopes. We can close by simply saying: Lord, hear our prayer. **Amen.**

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Session 2

Anger – Fear – Love

## Start (5 minutes)

As did the first session, this second one addresses the way political polarization poisons our ability to talk to each other, then feeds on the resulting discord. We can have better conversations!

This time we'll start by paying attention to some of our own emotions and how they get involved when we talk about politics. Anger is one of those emotions, and it can take a number of different forms. We'll look for ways our anger might promote better engagement.

*Have participants turn their handout for this session. Read the question at the top of the text box to the group, pausing to let it sink in, then continue reading the text.*

### What place should anger have in our Christian lives?

Notice how this question isn't just about anger in our political talk, it's about anger in our Christian lives. As with most topics in *The Colossian Way*, we'll find when examining anger in our political talk that it's also relevant for many other parts of our life, beyond politics.

Political issues quickly energize us. It's good when our emotions get involved. It shows we care. When we see political decisions going in harmful directions, anger can well up within us. That's not necessarily bad. It's more of a flashing signal, a smoke alarm, alerting us that something we care about is going wrong. When we get angry, we're aware that something needs to be done. Anger can push us to act for the good, to right a wrong. But we have to be careful. Christians have always been wary of anger because of how easily it can become destructive. At the same time, we might be tempted to deaden our anger and irresponsibly leave wrongs to continue. *In this session, we'll explore ways our anger over politics can be directed toward good.*

Could someone read the goals of *The Colossian Way* for us?

### Goals of The Colossian Way

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

Let's join in prayer.

### 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)



## Unity (12 minutes)

### Anger in the Christian Life

Some of us might have difficulty connecting with the idea of getting angry. Maybe that's not our way. It might be that our anger takes different forms. But in any case, we all have to deal with situations in life that could fairly be described as "angering." Political talk, in particular, provides lots of angering situations. It's for good reason that we learn not to bring up politics in polite conversation!

Anger is a very powerful emotion. It can give us courage to address important wrongs in the world. It can also drive us to harm others. It's no surprise that Christians have thought long and hard about the proper place — if any — for anger in the Christian life. To prepare us to think well about anger in our political talk, we'll watch a video featuring Dr. Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, who has thought long and hard about these issues.

You have a handout with three questions:

- What is anger and how does it work?
- What are signs for when anger is going right?
- What are signs for when anger has gone wrong?

As you watch the video, take down some thoughts on these issues, and we'll share briefly before we turn to prayer.

*Watch the video: "Anger in the Christian Life" (5 minutes)*

[tcway.org/pt3unity](http://tcway.org/pt3unity)

*After the video, invite thoughts people have gathered. If you're observing that some people are speaking less, you might invite them to open up the conversation. Rich as this material is, you will probably need to cut off comments in order to keep on track with the session schedule.*

## Prayer (8 minutes)

Some of us are aware of our ability to grow angry about political matters. In the video, Rebecca suggested that the wrongs of the world could lead us to be angry all the time. She also said that anger can motivate us to be helpful or destructive. It would seem that God cares about our anger, what we get angry about, and what we do with our anger. So, before we engage the topic of anger and political talk, we'll take a few minutes to read Scripture and pray.

On your handout, you have a reading from Ephesians 4. In this passage, Christians are called to put away the things that don't fit with living as the body of Christ. It brings up anger at the end, but we'll read the whole paragraph so that we can see how anger fits within the larger picture of living rightly as Christians. When the passage speaks of anger, it doesn't condemn it, but warns about the harm it can do.

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, then close with prayer.

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

*After a brief pause, read Ephesians 4:17-27 to the group.*

### Ephesians 4:17-27

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

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 for participants to share what struck them from the Scripture passage, then lead a brief closing prayer or ask someone else to pray.*

## Engage (27 minutes)

### Excavating Strong Feelings

Let's turn from thinking about anger to working on how we deal with anger. Polarization works by setting up encounters over difficult issues that easily lead to responses of fight, flight, or freeze — which all intensify polarization and its effects. That's why many of us avoid such encounters in the first place, and yet these are the very situations that The Colossian Forum encourages us to lean into, as opportunities for learning, spiritual formation, and deeper relationships. As we say at the start of each session, we are called to “practice *loving* God and neighbor while *engaging* difficult problems.”

To develop our skill in this area, we'll do an exercise called Excavating Strong Feelings. This exercise, based on the insight that behind many expressions of anger lies a fear, and behind the fear is a love being protected, is part of the Colossian Way curricula. For many Colossian Way participants, this anger-fear-love scheme becomes a main take-away, a “simple” tool for resisting the urge to blast back or retreat in silence.

Your handout lays out the exercise. Begin by recalling some recent time when you were at least concerned and maybe fully angry or resentful. Use that episode to respond to the questions on your handout. You will be excavating your strong feelings to find what lies beneath them. You'll do this in three stages:

1. Breaking ground: Recalling a time you were angry, frustrated, or resentful.
2. Digging deeper: Discovering the fear of loss behind your concern.
3. Finding treasure: Naming the thing you love—what your concern was protecting.

Go ahead and take a few minutes to reflect and take notes.

*Give about 4 minutes to work silently.*

In pairs, briefly share your reflections. If you'd like to pass, that's okay, just allow the other person to share in more depth.

*Give 5 minutes for sharing in pairs, then open up conversation for the whole group.*

I'd welcome hearing what emerged from your personal work and your sharing.

*Give 5 minutes for this plenary sharing.*

So far we've been thinking about how your own anger works. However, recognizing this anger-fear-love pattern is at least as important for responding to the anger you encounter. Learning good ways to inquire about the fear behind another's anger — and the love behind their fear — can transform an almost certainly polarizing engagement into an opportunity to learn and to build a relationship.

Take a few minutes to think about an occasion when another person's anger was directed at you, or at least you happened to be in the line of fire. Have you found ways to find out the fear behind anger, the love beneath the fear? Can you think of situations in which this simple anger-fear-love scheme might have helped you make a more constructive response than you were able for in the moment?

Take a couple minutes to think of an example, if you can, then share a little with the person next to you, and after that, we'll open up the conversation with the whole group.

*Give 2 minutes for pairs to talk, then ask who would be willing to share a story or insight.*

### Daily 60-Second Practice

*Introduce this week's 60-Second Practice, and note the Extra Credit assignment as well.*

Each day, spend a minute reflecting on a time when you were angry that day. Pray briefly, telling God what your anger was guarding. Confess selfish motives in your anger and ask God to help you act righteously out of your anger.

**Extra Credit:** Sometime this week, when you notice that someone you're talking with is angry, ask them a question of curiosity to better understand their anger.



## Godward (5 minutes)

We finish each session by turning consciously back to God in praise, lament, and hope.

We reflect on our work based on the goals of The Colossian Way. Have we gathered as Christians? Have we engaged the challenges with love of God and one another? Do we sense the body of Christ is being built up or torn and strained?

We start with praise. What do we give thanks to God for? What's going well in our group or in the world? Just call out a phrase or sentence.

*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. What hopes do we hold for our world? What hopes do we hold for ourselves, our group, and our work together?

*Finish the Godward time with a simple closing.*

Lord, hear our prayer. **Amen.**



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### **Session 3 Political Enemies**

## Start (5 minutes)

We've been challenged in previous sessions to examine ourselves as we engage in political talk. When we so cherish kindness and getting along with others, it can be difficult to look into our own hearts for anger or deceitfulness. This session takes us a step further into these challenges, as we explore ways we might treat some ideas and some people with contempt. As we do this work, our hope is that we will be willing to see clearly and respond in truth and love to what we find.

*Have participants turn to their handout for this session. Read the question at the of the text box, pausing to let it sink in, then continue reading the text.*

### In our polarized politics, does anything, or anyone, deserve our contempt?

Once we are divided, we can easily begin viewing "them" as our enemy. At that point, it's no longer about better and worse answers to political issues; we edge toward wanting "people like that" to no longer be part of our world. This is the domain of contempt, disdain, and even hatred. Jesus is very clear about our duty to respond in love toward all people, even our enemies. *In this session, we'll consider the nature of our Christian unity and the place of contempt in our political lives.*

Could someone read the goals of The Colossian Way for us?

### Goals of The Colossian Way

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

Let's join in prayer.

### 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)



## Unity (14 minutes)

### Christian Unity

To prepare us for considering the consequences and implications of our tendency to divide into opposing political groups of “us” and “them,” we begin with a video that explores the peculiar nature of our Christian unity. The story Dr. Katho tells is powerful, even shocking. After the video, we will take some time to consider the implications for our own lives and for our Christian unity.

*Watch the video: “Christian Unity” (5 minutes)*

[tcway.org/pt6unity](http://tcway.org/pt6unity)

*After the video, have participants turn to the section of their handout called, What Could Separate Us?*

In the video, Rob Barrett says that Paul identified five qualities necessary to maintain and nurture Christian unity: humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love. Let’s take some time to reflect individually on what Paul’s teaching and Dr. Katho’s story might be calling us to. This may be deeply personal and too early to say to others; perhaps you will be called to say something in the group.

*Give them at least three or four minutes to respond to the prompts. The individual work will be most important, but, afterward, you may want to invite them to share something they are pondering, either about the video in general or concerning the prompts on their handout.*

The work you have just done is your own, and you may not wish to share any of it right now. But is there anything you’re thinking, about the video in general or the specific prompts on the handout, that you would like to say to the group?

## Prayer (8 minutes)

As we turn to prayer, we're going to reflect on Paul's description of what love looks like in action.

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, then close with prayer.

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

*After a brief pause, read Romans 12: 9–21 to the group.*

### Romans 12:9–21

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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 for Participants to share what struck them from the Scripture passage, then lead a brief closing prayer or ask someone else to pray.*

## Engage (25 minutes)

### When We Feel Contempt

If we engage political talk with the categories of good and evil on our minds, we can fall into the trap of labeling our political opponents as worse than wrong. We might begin to consider some people as not worth talking to, not worth taking seriously. When we do that, we've stepped into the domain of "contempt."

We'll watch a video that explores the idea of contempt and how we might respond to it as Christians.

*Watch the video: "Love Your Enemies" (5 minutes)*

[tcway.org/pi7engage](http://tcway.org/pi7engage)

### A Strained Relationship

Contempt has this way of sneaking into our lives. We start with a distaste for certain ideas, which spreads and becomes a distaste for people holding those ideas. As we gather with those who agree with us and distance ourselves from "those other people" and their ideas, we increasingly feel that such people and their ideas just aren't worth dealing with. Round and round the cycle we go, growing increasingly confident about our contempt for these worthless ideas and stepping ever closer to deciding the people themselves, the ones holding such ideas, don't have any worth. We would prefer they not be part of our lives. They don't seem worth our time and energy.

I'm going to invite each of us to spend some time now reflecting on a relationship where you sense that you are somewhere on the road toward contempt. It might be someone you find yourself avoiding. Or maybe it's someone you avoid talking about meaningful things with because you know too well that what they will say is going to set you off. Or maybe you find yourself stifling an impulse to respond to them with sarcasm, or you catch yourself about to do an eye-roll.

Your disagreements may not be connected to politics. It might be their views on something else.

If you don't feel this exercise applies to you, that you aren't tempted toward contempt, that's okay. But take this time to search your heart. Perhaps commit to watching yourself over the coming week to see if any seeds of contempt are sprouting up within you that you haven't noticed before.

On your handout, you will find a series of questions to guide your reflection. Begin by thinking of someone you care about and disagree with about important matters, someone with whom your disagreement is moving toward contempt. **What are the views that you find distasteful?**

Then move on to the following questions: **How have you experienced loss of respect in your relationship? How has your relationship changed? How has that change in your relationship impacted you?**

I won't ask you to share your answers to any of these questions, but we will discuss the last two questions together. After reflecting on this strained relationship, these questions ask what you might be able to do to make things better. First, **what sort of internal change would you need to make in order to desire that person's well-being?** Then, second, **can you think of one thing you might be able to do to demonstrate your care for this person, something they would receive as loving, despite your sharp differences?**

*Offer your group a good chunk of time to reflect on these questions. Then open the discussion by inviting someone to share their answers to the last two questions about the internal change they could make and then how they might demonstrate their love. Invite questions of curiosity to explore what is being shared. You won't have time to hear everyone's story, but engage a few of the stories in some depth.*

*Some possible discussion prompts*

- *If you are having trouble finding any contempt in your heart or any relationships strained by contempt, why do you think this is?*
- *How do Jesus's responses to those who treated him with contempt provide helps to us?*

### Daily 60-Second Practice

*Introduce this week's 60-Second Practice, and note the Extra Credit assignment as well.*

Each day, spend one minute praying for your enemies.

**Extra Credit:** Sometime this week, think of someone for whom you feel contempt. Take one step toward expressing care for that person, whether in thought, word, or deed.

## Godward (5 minutes)

We finish each session by turning consciously back to God in praise, lament, and hope.

We reflect on our work based on the goals of The Colossian Way. Have we gathered as Christians? Have we engaged the challenges with love of God and one another? Do we sense the body of Christ is being built up or torn and strained?

We start with praise. What do we give thanks to God for? What's going well in our group or in the world? Just call out a phrase or sentence.

*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. What hopes do we hold for our world? What hopes do we hold for ourselves, our group, and our work together?

*Finish the Godward time with a simple closing.*

Lord, hear our prayer. **Amen.**



**THE  
COLOSSIAN  
FORUM™**



## **Midterm Election Resource**

**Participant Handouts**

# Session 1

## Questions of Curiosity

### Introduction

The vision of The Colossian Forum is to nurture a Christian community that acts Christian, especially in the face of conflict. That can be a challenge at any time, and not least in the run-up and aftermath to what is sure to be a contentious election. The three sessions in this packet of materials, drawn from The Colossian Way Political Talk curriculum, introduce some practices and perspectives that can help Christians act Christian in our polarized situation. We are focused especially on ways that people can maintain healthy relationships with others who think and voted differently than they do.

The Colossian Forum seeks to orient its work to the North Star of loving God and loving neighbor. Our standard of success is whether our programs result in an increase in the Fruit of the Spirit and a decrease in the works of the flesh. Toward these ends, Colossian Forum materials are grounded in basic Biblical elements of our shared Christian faith, and the practices we develop give form and expression to common Christian virtues. In this spirit, we offer these three sessions.

### Start

#### Why is political talk so filled with ugly content?

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. These three pre-election exercises focus 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.

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. This first session introduces a simple practice for making better conversations possible, as always with Colossian Way materials, in the context of worship and prayer.

#### 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)



## Unity

### Setting the Goals

This video ([tcway.org/pt1unity](http://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 ...

## Prayer

### 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.

## Engage

### Questions of Curiosity

- 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?

### Daily 60-Second Practice

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. You could even just talk back to the radio or television!

# Session 2

## Anger — Fear — Love

### Introduction

The vision of The Colossian Forum is to nurture a Christian community that acts Christian, especially in the face of conflict. That can be a challenge at any time, and not least in the run-up and aftermath to what is sure to be a contentious election. The three sessions in this packet of materials, drawn from The Colossian Way Political Talk curriculum, introduce some practices and perspectives that can help Christians act Christian in our polarized situation. We are focused especially on ways that people can maintain healthy relationships with others who think and voted differently than they do.

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### Start

#### What place should anger have in our Christian lives?

Notice how this question isn't just about anger in our political talk, it's about anger in our Christian life. As with most topics in The Colossian Way, we'll find when examining anger in our political talk that it's also relevant for many other parts of our life, beyond politics.

Political issues quickly energize us. It's good when our emotions get involved. It shows we care. When we see political decisions going in harmful directions, anger can well up within us. That's not necessarily bad. It's more of a flashing signal, a smoke alarm, alerting us that something we care about is going wrong. When we get angry, we're aware that something needs to be done. Anger can push us to act for the good, to right a wrong. But we have to be careful. Christians have always been wary of anger because of how easily it can become destructive. At the same time, we might be tempted to deaden our anger and irresponsibly leave wrongs to continue. *In this session, we'll explore ways our anger over politics can be directed toward good.*

#### 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)

## Unity

### Anger in the Christian Life

This video ([tcway.org/pt3unity](http://tcway.org/pt3unity)) prepare us to think well about anger in our political talk.

As you watch, consider these three questions:

- What is anger and how does it work?
- What are signs for when anger is going right?
- What are signs for when anger has gone wrong?

## Prayer

### Ephesians 4:17–27

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

## Engage

### Excavating Strong Feelings

Let's turn from thinking about anger to working on how we deal with anger. Polarization works by setting up encounters over difficult issues that easily lead to responses of fight, flight, or freeze — which all intensify polarization and its effects. That's why many of us avoid such encounters in the first place, and yet these are the very situations that The Colossian Forum encourages us to lean into, as opportunities for learning, spiritual formation, and deeper relationships. As we say at the start of each session, we are called to “practice *loving* God and neighbor while *engaging* difficult problems.”

### Breaking Ground (Anger)

Recall a time in the last week when you were concerned, maybe even angry or resentful.

- What happened that sparked a response?
- What other words would you use to describe your response (e.g., frustrated, annoyed, etc.)?

### Digging Deeper (Fear)

Now look for the fear of loss behind your concern.

- What were you concerned might go wrong or get damaged? What might you lose?
- What other words would you use to describe your concern (e.g., sadness, worry, anxiety, etc.)?

### Finding Treasure (Love)

Try to name the thing you love — what your concern was protecting.

- What did you love that was under threat?
- What was your fear or worry protecting?
- How did your anger (or other feeling of concern) connect with your love?

### Daily 60-Second Practice

Each day, spend a minute reflecting on a time when you were angry that day. Pray briefly, telling God what your anger was guarding. Confess selfish motives in your anger and ask God to help you act righteously out of your anger.

**Extra Credit:** Sometime this week, when you notice that someone you're talking with is angry, ask them a question of curiosity to better understand their anger.

# Session 3

## Political Enemies

### Introduction

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### Start

In our polarized politics, does anything (or anyone) deserve our contempt?

Once we are divided, we can easily begin viewing “them” as our enemy. At that point, it’s no longer about better and worse answers to political issues; we edge toward wanting “people like that” to no longer be part of our world. This is the domain of contempt, disdain, and even hatred. Jesus is very clear about our duty to respond in love toward all people, even our enemies. *In this session, we’ll consider the nature of our Christian unity and the place of contempt in our political lives.*

### Goals of The Colossian Way

- Gather Christians together.
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- Witness the body of Christ built up.

### Invocation and Confession

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*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)

## Unity

### Anger in the Christian Life

This video ([tcway.org/pt6unity](http://tcway.org/pt6unity)) considers the consequences and implications of our tendency to divide into opposing political groups of “us” and “them.”

### What Could Separate Us?

My commitment to our unity and to living out Christlike ...

- humility
- gentleness
- patience
- forbearance
- love

prompts me to say (to the group or to someone in the group):

## Prayer

### Romans 12:9–21

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

## Engage

### When We Feel Contempt

If we engage political talk with the categories of good and evil on our minds, we can fall into the trap of labeling our political opponents as worse than wrong. We might begin to consider some people as not worth talking to, not worth taking seriously. When we do that, we've stepped into the domain of "contempt."

### A Strained Relationship

Contempt has this way of sneaking into our lives. We start with a distaste for certain ideas, which spreads and becomes a distaste for people holding those ideas. As we gather with those who agree with us and distance ourselves from "those other people" and their ideas, we increasingly feel that such people and their ideas just aren't worth dealing with. Round and round the cycle we go, growing increasingly confident about our contempt for these worthless ideas and stepping ever closer to deciding the people themselves, the ones holding such ideas, don't have any worth. We would prefer they not be part of our lives. They don't seem worth our time and energy.

Think of someone you care about and disagree with about important matters, someone with whom your disagreement is moving toward contempt.

What are the views that you find distasteful?

How have you experienced loss of respect in your relationship?

How has your relationship changed?

How has that change in your relationship impacted you?

What sort of internal change would you need to make in order to desire that person's well-being?

Can you think of one thing you might be able to do to demonstrate your care for this person, something they would receive as loving, despite your sharp differences?

### Daily 60-Second Practice

Each day, spend one minute praying for your enemies.

**Extra Credit:** Sometime this week, think of someone for whom you feel contempt. Take one step toward expressing care for that person, whether in thought, word, or deed.

