

Small Group Discussion Guide



PREPARATION

STUDY

Spend the week studying Colossians 1:9–14. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

DETERMINE

Determine which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

LANDING POINT

Pray for the Spirit to take you to the next level of spiritual growth.



GROUP DISCUSSION

❑ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

❑ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

❑ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

❑ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

THE NEXT LEVEL

In the business world, people often talk and think about getting to the next level. If you're an intern, you want to become an employee, then a manager, a VP, a senior VP, an executive VP . . . there is always another rung of the ladder to climb. People who are really driven in their careers are never satisfied with where they are. Even if they've reached CEO status, they are always pushing themselves to learn more, grow more, do more, be more. They pursue continuing education or take on a mentor or pursue writing or speaking. They never stop growing.

Have you ever thought about going to the next level in your spiritual journey? Not that our spiritual lives are like climbing the corporate ladder. There aren't different levels of Christians like CEOs vs. interns. But our spiritual life is progressive. The fancy theological word for it is "sanctification"—the lifelong process of the Holy Spirit making us more and more like Jesus every day.

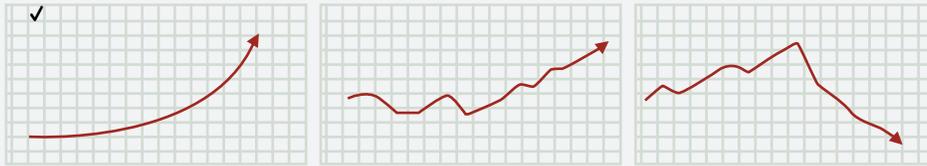
There are four big lies the world tells us about our identity:

1. I am what I have
2. I am what I do
3. I am what people say about me
4. I am what I've done

But the Bible says I am a New Creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). When you come to Jesus, your slate is wiped clean. Your past is gone and He spends the rest of your life making you a whole new person, giving you a new identity in Christ. That's what sanctification is.

Sanctification means to make holy. On one level, we are already holy. When we accept Jesus, we are declared holy before the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11). Theologians call that *justification*. But as we walk with the Spirit through our lives, we *grow* in holiness as He grows His fruit in us. Until we move on from this life and are made completely perfect in the final kingdom, we are never done growing in our faith. Though we all have ups and downs spiritually, we should always be moving forward, always shooting for that next level.

Q: Think about your spiritual journey so far. If you plotted it out on a graph, which one would it look more like?



Or draw your own:

Q: *How do you think people grow more spiritually mature? Is it something they do, something God does in them or some combination of both? What can you do to get to the next level spiritually?*



LEARN

Select 2–3 questions to discuss as a group.

PAUL'S PRAYER

Paul is thankful for the strong faith the Colossians already have, but he also prays for them to go to the next level spiritually. It is significant that Paul *prays* for spiritual growth for the Colossians. He doesn't just give them a checklist of "nine easy ways to grow spiritually" or "five steps to spiritual maturity." Paul does share his wisdom with them, but he also prays for their spiritual growth because he believes that spiritual growth is something supernatural.

It is something the Holy Spirit does *in* us. There are spiritual exercises we can do like prayer, fasting, solitude, simplicity, study, etc. But those disciplines don't *make* us holy. They just give the Holy Spirit the time and space to work in us. No matter how hard we work at it, we can't make ourselves holy. Only God is holy, and only God can make us holy. All we can do is get ourselves closer to God, abide in the Vine and let His Spirit grow His fruit in us.

Q: *What changes have you seen in your attitudes, behaviors or desires since you became a Christian? Any new sense of joy or hope or peace? A new love for others and the world? More patience, humility or selflessness?*

Q: *How can you stop being defined by your past and start living into your new identity in Christ?*

Q: *If the Christian method of sanctification is not to try harder at being holy, but to abide in Christ and let the Spirit make us holy, how do we do that practically?*

NOT JUST THE NEXT LEVEL

Paul doesn't just want them to go to the *next* level spiritually. He wants them to go all the way. Look at how many times Paul uses "all" or "every" in this passage:

- *All* spiritual wisdom and understanding
- *Fully* pleasing to Him
- Bearing fruit in *every* good work
- Being strengthened with *all* power
- For *all* endurance and patience with joy

Just like someone who is ambitious with their career, Paul is never satisfied with staying where he is spiritually. Paul believes you can always grow more, learn more, do more, be more.

Q: *Think about the most spiritually mature people you know. What is different about them than other people?*

Q: *How can we seek Christ in a world that has so many other options and distractions?*



LIVE

Select 2–3 questions from this section to answer.

KNOWLEDGE AND LIFESTYLE

Paul prayed for the Colossians to experience the next level both in spiritual *knowledge* and in spiritual *living*. Paul prayed that they would grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding, but he didn't stop there. Knowledge doesn't mean much of anything if you don't actually put it into practice. The purpose of spiritual knowledge is to change the way you live. Paul wants them to be filled with knowledge, wisdom and understanding, "so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord" (v. 10).

Guilt can be a good thing when it points us to changing our behavior to be more like Jesus. Guilt is "God's Unique Intentional Loving Treatment." If our guilt causes us to change so that we can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, that is healthy guilt. But when we let guilt tear us down and lead to shame, that is when we take what God has meant for good and distort it to hack into our soul. In Satan's view, guilt is "Grief United In Lifelong Torment."

We were not meant to be tormented by shame. God gave us feelings of guilt to lead to repentance. To turn us back to Him, so we can lead lives of freedom and joy. So we can learn what it means to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord." Wallowing in our guilt and shame does nothing good for ourselves or for the Gospel. But turning away from our sin and becoming a new creation is a beautiful picture of the Gospel. Living into our new identity in Christ in freedom and joy will draw others into faith in Jesus. As Christians, we bear Jesus' name. Are we living in way that is worthy of that label?

🗨️: *If someone just looked at your lifestyle, would they know that you are a Christian just by your actions, not your words?*

🗨️: *In what ways do you need to change in order to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord?*

FRUIT, POWER AND ENDURANCE

Paul has already said that the Spirit is growing fruit in their lives, but he prays for more. Spiritually speaking, you can never have too much fruit. God wants his people to flourish. If you could look under the ground at a fruit tree, you would see that the roots can spread two to three times wider than the branches. We don't grow the fruit of the Spirit by trying harder to be more patient or more loving. If we want to flourish, we need to dig our roots deep into



the rich soil of faith in Christ. Fruit takes time to grow, it doesn't always happen right away. But the deeper our roots grow, the more fruit we will bear. Each year more than the last.

Paul also prays for them to be strengthened with power, for endurance and patience with joy. God's Spirit gives us the strength to endure all that life has to throw our way. But it's not only a "grin and bear it" kind of endurance. It's a joyful endurance. Joy in our suffering, joy in our struggles. That kind of joy only comes from the Holy Spirit. Our spiritual journey is a marathon, not a sprint. The only way we will make it to the finish line is by the power of the Holy Spirit.

God wants to take us to the next level on our spiritual journey. But too many of us are complacent. We're comfortable where we are. The next level may sound scary or hard or just too much. Maybe we're afraid we'll be labeled a Jesus freak. Or that God will ask us to give up something we don't want to give up. Or that it will take too much time or effort or energy, and our lives are already so busy we can't imagine adding one more thing. Or maybe you just don't see the point.

But at each "next level" of your faith in Jesus, things start to come easier and to make more sense. Just like with exercise, the more you do it, the more natural it comes and the more you enjoy it. When we re-wallpaper our minds, when we break free of the prisons of our past, we will change. God will make you new. He will set you free. The next level may be your breakthrough moment! Maybe the next level is when you finally let go of your worry. Or when you finally stop resenting your spouse. Or when you find joy and purpose in your suffering.

Why would you settle for where you are now when God wants to give you so much more? It's like going on a hike and deciding to just hang out in the parking lot and missing out on the gorgeous view at the top of the mountain. There is so much more to see if you just start climbing.

Q: *Describe what the next level of your spiritual journey would look like. What needs to change? How can you get there?*

Q: *In what areas of your life do you need power and endurance?*



LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

Last week, we asked you to pray for your Christian friend’s spiritual growth. This week, we are asking you to pray for your own spiritual growth too. Ask the Holy Spirit to take you to the next level of faith. To push you and stretch you and take you out of your comfort zone.

Then take practical steps towards that next level of faith. Those are going to look different for each person, but whatever it is, it will be taking it a step closer to the Spirit. If you read the Bible twice a week, start reading it every day. If you read it for 10 minutes, start reading for 15 or 20. Try fasting or meditation. Start praying regularly with a friend. Read a book about spiritual growth or spiritual disciplines.

There are a million different ways you can connect more with God to get you to the next level in your spiritual life. The important thing is don’t stay where you are! Take a step forward.

Q: What specific steps forward can you commit to taking this week?

Q: What is holding you back from taking those steps forward?



PRAY

PRAYER PARTNERS

Be sure to allow extra prayer time for this activity so partners can really share.

Split into the same prayer partners from last week. Share any changes from last week and any requests about your own spiritual growth, then pray for each other. Remember, this group is confidential and this is your church family—it is safe to be vulnerable here.



FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read Ephesians 4:1–3 and 25–32 and reflect on how your life needs to change to be “in a manner worthy of the calling.”
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



COMMENTARY

KNOWLEDGE AND LIVING “This knowledge is no merely intellectual exercise, no theosophical *gnōsis* such as was affected by the teachers who threatened to lead the Colossian church astray . . . True knowledge . . . is that knowledge which, as the OT wisdom writers affirmed, started with a proper attitude toward God. Right knowledge leads to right behavior.”¹

CONTROLLED BY THE SPIRIT “In the language of the New Testament, to be ‘filled’ means to be ‘controlled by.’ When we are filled with anger, we are controlled by anger. To be ‘filled with the Spirit’ (Eph. 5:18) means to be ‘controlled by the Spirit.’ Paul’s prayer, then is that these believers might be controlled by the full knowledge of God’s will. But how does this take place? . . . We understand the will of God through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit teaches us as we submit to Him (John 14:26; 16:13). As we pray and sincerely seek God’s truth, He gives us through the Spirit the wisdom and insight that we need (Eph. 1:17).”²

THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS “In the Old Testament, the ‘saints’ or ‘holy’ or ‘set-apart ones’ were Israel. Israel’s ‘inheritance’ was first of all the Promised Land but in Jewish tradition pointed toward the ultimate possession of the world to come. Christians become heirs of these promises in Christ. ‘Light’ and ‘darkness’ were regularly contrasted as good and bad respectively, and this was often applied to the conflict between good and evil realms in the Dead Sea Scrolls and often in ancient literature). . . Jewish people described their deliverance from Egypt as a call ‘from darkness into great light’ and redemption from slavery.”³

GOD’S WILL ““What Paul has in mind is not some particular or special direction for one’s life (as we often use the phrase, ‘God’s will’), but a deep and abiding understanding of the revelation of Christ and all that he means for the universe (vv. 15–20) and for the Colossians (vv. 21–23).”⁴

ENDNOTES:

1. F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 46. or *Flight* *Psychol Rev*, 107(3):41-429. - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10941275?dopt=Abstract>
2. Warren Wiersbe, *Be Complete: Become the Whole Person God Intends You to Be*, NT Commentary (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook 1961), 45.
3. Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 570.
4. Douglas J. Moo, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 92.