

What to Pray For

Colossians 1:1-14 (ESV) 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. ⁹ 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, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption [Jesus purchased our freedom], the forgiveness of sins.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Amen. Paul was in a season of life that was chosen for him and not one that he chose. He was chained to a prison guard in Rome. From prison Paul wrote several letters that we call the prison epistles. Paul was innocent of all charges and imprisoned unjustly. Surprisingly, every letter he wrote tells us that he is thankful to God for the work God is doing in the churches. He does not whine at all about his present circumstances but is filled with a thankful heart eager for the Good News of Jesus Christ to go out from him through letters. Billy Graham once said it is a good thing Paul spent so much time in prison. He probably would have not taken the time to write the letters being so busy as a missionary, always on the go.

This leads to our first point. **1. For every season in life, God has a purpose, a plan, specific tasks God wants to do through you as God's representative on earth.** You are a minister of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, once you become a Christian. Whether you are a mother up all night with a crying baby, or an old man in the nursing home, God has work, actual ministry for you to do in the name of Jesus. Paul was in prison, and it afforded him the

time to present the Gospel in writing. I was told one time how to pray for young mothers. Pray that they can get a good night's sleep. I have heard of people sharing the Gospel out on the golf course. Wherever you are God wants to use you for His purposes, no matter what season of life you are in. Jesus is the Supreme Lord over our lives in every season even if you have to spend time in jail.

Paul had never been to Colosse. Colosse was about 80 miles from Ephesus. Paul started the church at Ephesus and from there Epaphras, a coworker of Paul's, left and went to Colosse. Epaphras had an effective ministry and the church of Colosse was formed with the help of Philemon. Sometimes as church attenders, we wrongly think, "God could never use me." You think you do not know enough about God or the Bible to be used of God. This week a friend of mine texted me. He told me that he prayed with two Lake County Forest Preserve officers. I was so encouraged to hear this. It does not take a pastor to do such acts of ministry. **2. We all can be an instrument of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and do acts of ministry.** It is our calling.

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. Paul begins most of his letters with this greeting. What I like most about Paul's greeting is his awareness, his understanding of his true identity in Christ. Paul knew the power of the Gospel in every part of his being and it had to get out either in speech or writing. **3. Please never think that you are one of God's unusable people. 4. God has gifted you to represent the Gospel with your God-given personality and God-given spiritual gifts.** You are able to do far more with the help of Jesus than you ever thought before. May God strengthen us all in our established identity, knowing who we are in Christ.

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.

Notice the attitude of thankfulness. Chained to a prison guard, Paul still had much to be thankful for.

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, 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. The faith of the believers in Christ at Colosse was so strong that it was spoken of to Paul in a Roman prison hundreds of miles away. Friends, in the United States and Europe, Christianity is on the decline. I believe God has given us over to our sin because so many have ignored and mocked God to the max. When God gives a person or a nation over to their sin, the restraining power of the Holy Spirit is pulled back and God gives the person, the nation over to sin in whatever way they wish. God withdraws His restraining power of sin so people will experience the full consequences of their actions and repent of their sinful ways. God's judgements are acts of grace to bring about repentance. In countries like China, Africa, and South America Christianity is booming, bearing fruit, and increasing. And when you hear the stories of what God is doing in those countries it is absolutely thrilling and we thank God for it. The Gospel is bearing good fruit worldwide and I hope in your life.

In verse 4 and 5 Paul speaks of the people's profound faith, their firm belief in Jesus, their lifestyle of living out the Gospel. Paul also calls them saints and commends them for the love that they have for each other. Yes, the Bible calls Christians saints. We are set apart by God from sin for a special purpose to be instruments of the Good News of Jesus Christ. You have been set aside by God, handpicked, selected to be an instrument of God no matter what season of life you are in. The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus Christ died to provide complete forgiveness of sins and rose again that those who believe might live forever. May we all feel that intense love from the Gospel in this place of worship. Such love is an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit.

Faith, love and then Paul speaks of hope laid up for you in heaven. Hope is an eager expectation for what God has guaranteed. Hope is based on faith. **4. Hope knows that the future holds something far better than the present.** Paul writes, **Romans 8:18 (ESV)** ¹⁸ *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* This past week Bonny Hendrickson was on her death bed surrounded by her loving family. Christian songs were sung like “Jesus loves me.” Prayers were prayed. Love was spoken and given. Their faith in Jesus could be felt in the room. All were full of hope knowing that better times are coming to Bonny real soon. Faith, love, and hope in Christ is what life is all about.

⁹ *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,* ¹⁰ *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.* In this church we are always pushing prayer. We have a prayer chain. We have three days of prayer, 30 days of prayer, and we have weekly prayer meetings. Paul gives to us a healthy way to pray for each other. **5. It is good to pray for God to fill our brothers and sisters in Christ with the knowledge of God’s will.** The Bible is so clear in so many ways of what God’s will is for us. Love God. Love each other. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, repent, and much, much, more. **6. It is good to pray for God to increase in us spiritual wisdom and understanding.** In these days of increasing darkness, of 24 hours of bad news, of crises after crises, our souls are aching for spiritual wisdom and understanding. We want to know the best way to live for God. **7. Spiritual wisdom and understanding comes your way as the Holy Spirit of God takes the Word of God and applies it to your personally, deeply, intimately.**

Do you know that when I am preaching it is your responsibility to ask the Holy Spirit to apply to your life what I am saying. My words without personal application can be a waste of

time. I cannot tell you how to personally apply what I am saying. That has to be the quiet work of the Holy Spirit in your soul as you listen to what the Spirit is saying. Please do not sit there and think Pastor, please say something new. No, sit there and think, Holy Spirit please help me to hear what you want me to hear. Give me ears to hear. When we have stubbornness of heart our ears go deaf to the Holy Spirit. If we sit there with a critical spirit, it is almost impossible to take in something good.

¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. **8. We pray for God to strengthen us with all power and God's glorious might.** Living for Jesus is more than just taking in knowledge. Living full time for Jesus means God's Holy Presence works inside of you strengthening you to do God's will. God has you on a journey to draw closer to Himself and to be used mightily by God. This is how we can endure the worst of circumstances remaining faithful to God. This is how we can be patient with the most difficult of people, strengthened by God on the inside. God works all of this inside of us so we can display these traits outwardly. One day we will all be gathered into heaven and see God knew exactly what he was talking about. Oh, to have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption [Jesus purchased our freedom], the forgiveness of sins. Before you were born again, born anew, saved by God's grace through faith, you belonged to the kingdom of darkness, and you lived in darkness. God's grace came to you, birthed faith inside of you and transferred you into God's kingdom, the kingdom of his beloved Son. The transfer cost Jesus everything on the cross and He gladly paid for your new life in Christ that brought about the forgiveness of all your sins.

There are men in this church whose souls want to experience more of God. You desire to be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Please be brave and attend the men's meeting on the 2nd Saturday of each month. If you feel you do not know enough about the Bible or you feel awkward attending, please know you are in good company. Almost all of the men feel that way. **9. If we do not put in any effort into growing it will not take place.**

Women, we have all sorts of studies for you. Please take advantage of them. No matter what season of life you are in God has purposes for you, plans for you, tasks for you to do as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen and Amen.