

Encouragement to Pray

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[0:00] We're going to read the first 14 verses, Colossians 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace and peace to you from God our Father.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints, the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.

All over the world, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace and all its truth.

You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

[1:27] And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience and joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

For he has rescued us from the kingdom of the Lord. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of the Lord. I don't think anyone has ever looked into a mirror and saw how dirty they were and they thought, wow, I am so dirty, there's nothing I can do about this and so I might as well just forget it. But it's going to be easy to do that exact thing tonight. Tonight, we're going to be looking intently into God's word.

And as James has said, it's like a mirror. It's going to show us what we're like. And I doubt that you'll come away unscathed, feeling accomplished, saying, well, I got this one down.

[2:59] Because tonight we're going to be looking at the duty that we have as Christians to pray for others. And prayer is hard.

We could talk about the reasons why prayer is hard. But let's just say it, prayer is hard. And so it's going to be easy to see the dirt and just say, forget it.

I'll just muddle along as I am. So even before we begin talking about three lessons on prayer, I want to give you three reasons why you shouldn't be discouraged about your prayer life.

I want to give you some hope and some encouragement before we learn those lessons. And these three reasons come to us as three promises.

Promise number one is that Jesus died and rose again to give you this access. We saw this a couple of weeks ago, Hebrews 10, 19.

[4:07] Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened up for us through the curtain that is his body.

And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith.

You don't need to be discouraged in your prayer life because as poor and as weak and as faulty as it might be, you still have an open door to God because of what Jesus has done and who Jesus is for you.

Your priest stands offering up his sacrifice, opening the way to God. And so you don't have to bash in the gates of heaven.

Jesus died and rose again. You have a wide open door to draw near to God. Promise number two is that God is not done with you yet.

[5:14] If you are a Christian, you can be assured that God is not done with you yet. Romans 8, 28, or 8, 29. For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son, that he might be called the firstborn among many brothers.

And those he predestined, he also called. And those he called, he also justified. And those he justified, he also glorified. You don't need to be discouraged, no matter the state of your prayer life, because God is not discouraged.

He has a goal. He has a purpose. He will accomplish it in your life. God hasn't stopped working. You are going to be like his son. You are going to be glorified. And he is at work in you to accomplish these things. So God is not standing still.

He's not standing still in your prayer life. And so you don't need to stand still either. Promise number three is that you have one of the persons of the Trinity living inside of you to help you pray.

[6:28] Amen. Amen. How serious is God about helping you with your prayer life? Well, he lives in you to help you.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. So do you feel your weakness in this area? Well, you're not alone. Paul himself could say that in the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness, we don't know what we ought to pray for.

But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

The Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, lives within believers to help us to pray. Maybe you feel nothing but weakness.

Maybe you feel nothing but failure. But look what God has done for you. He's imparted his very self to you. The Spirit himself intercedes for you.

[7:37] So you're at a loss. You're weak. You're faulty. You feel nothing but those failures. But the Spirit takes up the pieces of our hearts and offers them to God.

So that isn't a reason to not pray. That is a reason to struggle on. Just because the Spirit is there and he's taking our heart and he's presenting those things to God, that's not a reason for you not to pray.

It is a reason for you to pray with joy because Christ lives for you. The Spirit is in you, helping you pray. And so you go on the arm of the Savior. And you go and you fly on the wings of the Spirit. And the Father himself has given you the Spirit. The Father himself has given you this priest. All three persons of the Trinity are for you. God is for your prayer life.

And so even as we begin with these lessons, and in some way we're confronted with our failures and our selfishness and our sin in this area, don't lose heart.

[8:46] God is for you. God is not finished with you. God is here to help you. Jesus stands to help you to pray. And so as we now turn our attention to the text, it's Colossians 1 verse 9.

We're going to be learning three lessons on prayer. And specifically praying for others. And if we were even to narrow it down even more, it would be praying for people we haven't met.

Praying for people we haven't met. So three lessons in these. First, we should pray for people we haven't met. We should pray for people we haven't met.

Second, we should keep praying. We should keep praying. And third, Thanksgiving encourages us to keep praying.

So Thanksgiving encourages us to keep praying. And so first, in the first place, we see that we should pray for others that we haven't met. We should pray for people that we haven't met.

[9:48] And that's in verses 7 through 9. Now you remember that Paul had never met these believers in Colossae. He had never been there. They had heard the gospel from Epaphras.

And so these are sort of like Paul's grandchildren, but he has never visited them. We don't know if he ever actually came to Colossae, that they ever met. And yet Paul says in verse 3, we always thank God when we pray for you.

And then in verse 9, he says, for this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. And there's our first lesson.

It's very obvious. It's on the surface. We should pray for others. We should pray for people we haven't met. Paul prayed for people that he hadn't met. And I'm not saying anything new there. That's not something profound. That's a no-brainer. But do you do it? Do you do it?

[10:55] Do you remember how Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount? The children know. There's a song about it. The wise man built his, let's see, built his house upon the rock, didn't he?

And the rains came down and the floods came up. And the house on the rock stood firm. But the foolish man built his house upon the sand.

And the rains came down and the floods came up. And the house on the sand went splat. Right. You remember.

Now, who was the wise man? And who was the foolish man? Listen to what Jesus said. Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man. The wise man hears.

[12:03] The foolish man hears. The difference is not in the hearing. The difference is not in the knowing. The difference is in the doing. So we should pray for others.

Paul shows us that. There's the example. Are we doing it? Now, prayer for yourself, praying for yourself, is the start of the Christian life.

Every Christian's life begins with a prayer for himself, for herself. So God comes by his spirit and he comes with convincing power and light.

He opens our eyes to the law and we see that we've sinned. We've failed. And that comes with terror and that comes with truth.

He puts his finger on our sin and he points us to the Savior. And so we pray. We pray, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. That's how our life begins, with a prayer to God.

[13:13] It's our first cry. It's for ourselves. Have mercy on me. So praying for yourself is the start of the Christian life. But the Christian life must grow from there.

If you're not even praying for yourself, then how could you be a Christian? But if you are only praying for yourself and you really aren't praying for other people, then I would say you haven't grown very much.

You're not born at all if you're not praying at all. But you haven't matured very much if you're just still praying for yourself and your concerns. People, or Paul prayed for people he hadn't met.

So how big is your heart? How big is your heart? How grown up is your faith? Your prayer life will show you.

Your prayer life will show you how grown up, how big your faith is, how big your heart is. So we go into an air traffic controller tower, an air traffic tower, and you know those radars.

[14:25] I don't even know if they have them anymore, but in the movies they do. They have those round radar screens. And you know, it has that green line that's going around and around, and for every airplane, there's a little blip showing where all the airplanes are in the sky.

Well, in this radar, it doesn't detect airplanes. It detects people that you're praying for. It detects people that you're praying for.

Now, look at that radar tower, or that radar. Where are the blips? Where are the dots? Are they centered right around you?

Are there a lot of blips for you? Maybe there are a few other blips for people that you're close to, for your family, your wife, your kids.

Maybe there are a lot of blips for you and yours. And that's good. If you don't pray for them, who will pray for them? Nothing wrong with praying for all those people. But there should be blips on the outside of the screen, near the edges.

[15:36] There should be blips out there for people that you haven't met, that aren't in your immediate family, that aren't in your immediate, you know them.

There should be blips for people in the church. There should be blips for people around the world, for people you haven't met. Paul didn't know these people. He'd never seen them.

He couldn't recognize them on the street. He didn't know what they looked like. But he knew that God had saved them. He knew that God had given them a hope, that faith and love were working in their hearts.

Paul knew that the gospel had come to them, and that gospel was now bearing fruit and growing. And so Paul prayed for them. He didn't know them, but they were his brothers. And Paul had this big family with brothers all over the world. He had a big heart, and he was a big Christian with a big family. And a big Christian has a big Jesus and a big gospel, and he has a big prayer life.

[16 : 43] Paul was a worldwide Christian. Paul's prayers went all around the world. Wherever Jesus went, wherever Jesus was going, wherever the gospel was going, Paul's prayers were following right along.

So Mary had a little lamb, right? And that lamb followed her wherever she went. Well, Jesus had a little lamb that followed him wherever he went, and it was Paul's prayers.

Wherever he came and saved, Paul was praying for those people. And he was praying for people he hadn't even met. His prayers followed Jesus wherever he went, and ours should too.

That's our first lesson. Here's the second. We should keep praying. We should keep praying for people we haven't met. We should keep praying for others. So what does Paul say?

For this reason, verse 9, for this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We have not stopped praying.

[17 : 49] In verse 3, he says, we always thank God for you. We've not stopped praying for you. Praying for others, praying for these people, was something that Paul did day after day after day.

Now, sometimes we think that when Paul's talking about always praying, and always thanking God, that he's sort of talking about just a spirit of prayer, where he was always ready to send off a prayer dart to heaven.

And so something would remind him, and there he would go, and there he would pray. It would trigger a prayer up to God. And that is right. That is right. That is what it means to be a Christian, that you're walking with God, that you have communion with God.

That's partly what it means to pray without ceasing, without stopping. And that's surely the heart of communion with God, of living with God, of walking with God. So Enoch walked with God.

He talked with God. That's the sweet life. That's the good life. To be able to always talk to God. But I fear, and I know the temptation in my own heart, that we hear that, and that ends up meaning that we don't have regular times, set times of prayer.

[19 : 17] And so we twist it to mean, well, I don't need regular set times for prayer, because I'm always praying. Well, the Bible does teach regular, quick communion prayers with God, where you're talking with God.

You remember, Nehemiah was sad. His city was destroyed. Jerusalem was destroyed. And he's sad. His face is downcast. And the king asks him, Nehemiah, why are you so sad? And in that instant, he did a number of things.

He answered the king, and he prayed to God at the very same time. And that's true. But the Bible tells us more than that.

Jesus made it a regular practice to go off and pray in the morning. David talks about praying seven times a day, or three times a day.

Remember Daniel's practice of praying three times a day, set times. Paul himself says, I pray for you again and again and again. I don't stop praying for you.

[20 : 24] And so that means that not only was he just praying for them whenever the thought hit him, but he made it a practice to consciously, continuously be praying for them.

You see, there are some prayers that need to be prayed again and again and again. There are some things that we must pray for again and again and again, not because God isn't answering, but because there is a need again and again and again.

So think about the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer. There are six petitions. Six petitions.

Six requests. And how often do we need to pray these six requests? How often do you need to pray for those things?

Well, not just once and you're done, but day after day. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer you can pray over and over again, not because you're being superstitious.

[21 : 57] We're not talking about doing a hundred Hail Marys or 60 Our Fathers. We are talking about some things that need to be prayed for again and again and again. And so you pray for them again and again and again.

And that's what Paul was praying for. That's how Paul was praying for these Colossians. He prayed regularly, consciously for them because the need was there.

Look at his prayer. And we're going to look at it more next week. But he wants them to be filled with the knowledge of God through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

That isn't something that would happen once. And just that was it. That would need to happen day after day after day because there would be new challenges, there would be new struggles, there would be new sins, there would be new obstacles, there would be new questions.

And so for all of these things, day after day, Paul was praying for them. His prayers found them out and lifted them up to heaven and he prayed for them.

[23:00] And so what an example for us. What an example for us, brothers and sisters. What a blessing we could be for missionaries and for church planters, for these people that we haven't met, for even people that we have met.

What a blessing we could be if we would discipline ourselves to be like Paul who prayed again and again. He was a warrior at it. He was devoted to it.

He was dedicated to it. Things weren't going to stop him. He was going to make sure that he had time to pray. Even Jesus, when it was so busy, he had so much to do and he had so many really, really, really, really good things to do.

So what do you have to do? I'm going to get up before everyone else and I'm going to pray. I'm going to carve out time. I'm going to carve out sections of my life that God has so I can pray.

That's our second lesson. Keep praying. And here's the third lesson that we learn from this verse is that Thanksgiving should encourage us to keep praying.

[24:06] Thanksgiving should encourage us to keep praying. Now Paul does something very interesting in this entire passage in these verses 3 through 14.

And last week, we looked at the things that Paul's thankful for. What the Colossians have in the gospel? In verse 9, he transitions from thanksgiving to praying for them.

But he doesn't forget everything that he said before. He doesn't forget all of that. It's not on to something new. In verse 9, you see that. He says, for this reason.

For this reason. Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying. Now, that reason is not just their love for them, but that reason is everything that Paul's talked about.

All the things that they've enjoyed because of the gospel. All of those reasons that are still working in their lives. He now brings them up and he says, for this reason, we don't stop praying for you.

[25:15] And so, he takes what he's talked about in verses 3 through 8, and now he echoes them in verses 9 through 12.

So, verses 9 through 12 is the echo of verses 3 through 8. All the reasons he had to be thankful for, he now uses to pray for them. He echoes what he's already said.

Just listen and look at the echoes between these two sections. It starts in verse 3 with thanking God. We always thank God.

That's where it starts. It ends in verse 12 with thanking the Father. So, thanking God is a bow that ties this entire passage together.

He says, we always thank God. And then he says, we have not stopped praying. In verse 6, he says, since the day you heard the gospel. In verse 9, he says, since the day we heard about you.

[26:15] In verse 3, he says, when we pray for you. In verse 9, he says, praying for you. In verse 6, he talks about them understanding the gospel. In verse 9, he asks God for more understanding.

In verse 6, he says, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing. In verse 10, he prays that they would bear fruit and grow in knowledge. Do you see the pattern?

He thanks God for all the things that he's been doing, and then he takes and he says, now God, do more. Do more. And he keeps praying for them.

And we know how this works. This works in our life. And so we hear about a missionary. A missionary reports a conversion. This man has been saved. This woman has been saved. And we say, thank you.

And then, doesn't that encourage us to say, now God, do more. Do more. more. We say, God really does answer.

[27:14] He really does. So I'm going to pray. I'm going to keep praying for more. So I hear about a visitor coming to a church plant. Or visitors coming.

And we say, thank you. Now send more. Send more. You're able to do this. We've seen it. Thank you. Now do it more. And that's how Paul prayed. He took the things he was thankful for and he said to God, now do more.

Do more. See, good news about God answering prayer, it doesn't inspire thanks alone. It also encourages and inspires us to pray more.

To keep asking. If someone is so kind as to keep giving us something, doesn't that encourage us to keep asking? And so, we shouldn't be praying just for people when the situation is bad.

And I think that's our tendency. We see someone in a bad situation and then we pray. And that's right and that's good. But we should be praying when it is good.

[28:16] When God is blessing them. God had blessed the Colossians. Now Paul is still praying for them. So are your children showing signs of spiritual life? Thank God.

Ask for more. Is your husband growing in grace and love and patience? Is your wife growing in those things? Are you seeing change in your own life? In your friends' lives?

Are you doing more? Is God answering? Is God working? You say thank you and then you ask for more of the same. You ask for more. So is that your instinct?

Is that your practice? To not only pray for the church when there are problems. To not only pray for people when there are problems. But when there's growth.

And when there's blessing. To not only pray for our children when they're making bad decisions.

But praying for them when they're making good decisions. You see Thanksgiving it gives us things to pray for.

[29:16] Things that we can be thankful for are things that we can ask for more of. That's our third lesson. Now, as we end. How can we put this all into practice?

Just some very simple things. How can we put this into practice? One. Come to prayer meeting. Come to prayer meeting.

In the prayer meeting you'll hear about ongoing concerns about people that you have never met. So do you want an easy way to find out how to pray for people that you haven't met?

Come to prayer meeting. It'll be a great first step to following Paul's example. How do you put this into practice? Number two. I'll just grab this.

Use the mission prayer focus. One request per day. And what a great start. Sometimes starting is half the battle.

[30:17] Well, use that. How can you pray for people you haven't met? Use the mission prayer focus that we hand out each month. It's an easy tool to use. Three. How can you put this into practice?

Set a regular time to pray. None of these things are amazing. But set a regular time to pray. If prayer is one of the last things you get to, if it's one of the things that you never get to, it's time to move it to the top of the list.

And I very much doubt that it will be moved to the top of the list if you do not make a planned effort to do so.

One reason that we don't have a more significant prayer life is not that we don't want to. I think everyone here wants to have a great prayer life.

But we don't plan. So if you wanted to take a four week vacation, you wouldn't just get up in the morning and say, let's go. You know, that might sound fun and that might sound something, but you know what?

[31:32] It's not going to happen. People don't get up and say, alright, we're out of here for four weeks. And that's how many of us treat prayer. We get up day after day and nothing changes.

Well, we don't know where to go. Nothing's planned. There's no time. There's no place. There's no procedure. There's no way to get out the door. There's no way to go on that vacation.

And you know, the opposite of planning is not the spontaneous, wonderful prayer life, is it? It's not that. It's a rut. It's nothing.

It's staying at home instead of going on vacation. It's staying home doing the same old, same old.

And so as I end, I'll just end with this word.

Take time tonight. Take time tomorrow morning and figure out what place, where prayer fits into your life.

[32:32] and plan. Set a time. Set a place. Set a procedure. Do something to start. And remember as you start, remember how we began this.

Remember those three promises. Jesus died and rose again so that you could draw near to God. God is going to make us like his son.

Our present prayerlessness is not the way things have to be. It's not inevitable. God is working for us. God is working in us.

He is working in you. And third, God has given you the Holy Spirit to help you to pray. And so lean on him, trust in him, ask him for help.

And so let's pray in hope. Let's grow out of our small prayers. And let's live more on that grace of our Lord Jesus and that is available to you to help you to do this hard work of praying.

[33:42] Let's pray. our Heavenly Father, will you please forgive us for our lack of prayer.

Forgive us for our self-sufficiency and for our self-righteousness and for our pride and for every idol of self that motivates us and moves us not to pray.

For our selfishness in our prayers, will you please forgive us? Lord Jesus, may your cross teach us to love others, to love others and seek their welfare and their good, to not always be thinking about ourselves and our needs and our wants and our desires, but to be captured and to be moved at the impulse of your love.

You loved others. You sacrificed for others. Will you lead us by your spirit into a sacrificial prayer life that we would not always be thinking about us and ourselves, but what would be good for others? what would be glorifying to you? And so we do pray that your name would be hallowed, that your kingdom would come, that your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[35:17] Father, we want to be more and more like your son. Thank you that you are committed to that. Will you please change us and transform us in this matter of prayer.

I pray, Lord, that the gospel message that we heard this morning would come with power and conviction to those who are lost here tonight. And if they heard that gospel message that you would make it to stick into their mind and in their heart and give them no rest till they're right with you, please come in saving mercy and sanctifying mercy to us all.

In Jesus' name I pray, amen.