

# Paul's Prayer

*February 23, 2025*

## Lesson Summary

### **Main Passages**

Colossians 1:9-14

### **Session Outline**

1. Nonstop Prayer (Colossians 1:9)
2. Paul's Prayer for the Colossians (Colossians 1:10-11)
3. Praise and Thanks (Colossians 1:12-14)

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### **Theological Theme**

Knowing God's will for our lives and faithfully walking the path He has created for us is essential to our spiritual growth.

### **Call to Action**

Are we growing in the gospel by growing in knowing and doing God's will? Are we growing in being doers of God's Word? Are we growing in knowing God and not just knowing facts about God? Are we growing in joy-filled endurance and gratitude for all God has done for us in the gospel?



## Leader Guide

# Paul's Prayer

### Introduction

In his book *Draw the Circle*, Mark Batterson wrote about a testimony he received after writing his bestseller on prayer, *The Circle Maker*. In a time of drought in a rural Mississippi farming community, a local church called an emergency prayer meeting. While many community members showed up, only one man showed up in waders. He didn't want to get wet when he went home. When the rain came, everyone else got wet on the way home, but that man didn't.<sup>1</sup>

We know prayer is powerful, and church history records many more stories like this one, but stories like this make us wonder if our habits reflect our claims. Prayer was a deeply ingrained habit for Paul and something we know he wholeheartedly believed in because of the model of his life and his writings in the pages of Scripture. Paul prayed with metaphorical waders, knowing God was listening and would always answer, even if He didn't always answer with a yes.

Paul opened his letter mentioning that he prayed for the people in Colossae (v. 3). In today's passage, Colossians 1:9-14, we'll get a look into what Paul prayed for on behalf of the Colossian church: spiritual growth. We'll explore Paul's prayer for spiritual growth, why he thought this was an important thing to pray for, and how we can get serious about cultivating spiritual growth in our own lives.

- ❓ How would you define spiritual growth? Where else do we see growth mentioned in Scripture?
- ❓ Why is this growth something we need to pray for?

### Session Summary

After learning of the Colossian believers' faith and love, Paul and his companions hadn't stopped praying for them. The essence of Paul's prayer was that this body of believers would understand God's will for their lives, then walk in a manner that was worthy of and pleasing to the Lord by growing spiritually. Paul noted that because to the help of the Holy Spirit, we can endure with patience during trials.

Paul also wrote that God rescued us from the clutches of Satan and his kingdom of darkness and transferred us into Jesus’s everlasting kingdom of light. Jesus paid for our sins on the cross and, thanks to Him, our sins—past, present, and future—are forgiven.

## 1. Nonstop Prayer (Colossians 1:9)

In Colossians 1:3-7, we learned that Paul had heard of the Colossian congregation’s faith and love and about how the gospel had grown and borne fruit among them (vv. 4-6). Paul mentioned praying and thanking God for them even though he had never met them. Here in verse 9, we learn more about the way Paul prayed for them specifically.

Paul said that since he’d heard about them from Epaphras, “we haven’t stopped praying for you” (v .9). Paul prayed for this body of believers, and not just once as we might do to keep a promise to pray for a situation. Paul hadn’t stopped praying for them.

Paul’s dedication to continuous prayer models what he had previously written to the church at Thessalonica: “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Paul’s example continues to be one to strive for in our own prayer lives.

Paul went on to tell them what, exactly, he had been praying for so faithfully: for them to be “filled” with knowledge of God’s will, wisdom, and spiritual understanding.

- ❓ What do you think Paul meant when he said he was “asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will”? Why might that be important?
- ❓ What do you think Paul meant when he prayed for this body of believers to be filled with “spiritual understanding”?

Paul didn’t pray that the believers would learn and grow on their own—he petitioned the Lord on their behalf. This is a goal all committed believers should actively pursue, and Scripture teaches us that knowledge of the Lord’s will for our lives, true wisdom, and all spiritual understanding aren’t earned by our own cleverness or because of our good deeds but are all given by the Lord.

The way Paul prayed here tells us God’s will for our lives and our knowledge of His will are two separate things. God has a plan and a purpose for our lives, just as He did for the Colossian believers. But it isn’t a given that we will know and understand His will intrinsically. God gives us understanding as we seek Him, but it can be difficult to know where to start that seeking.

### Filled

The false teachers promised a special insight and a superior spirituality. Terms like *knowledge*, *wisdom*, and *spiritual understanding* were a part of the false teachers’ vocabulary. So Paul employed these types of words in his prayer. The prayer requested that God “fill” them “with the knowledge of his will.” The term “filled” is a key word in Colossians. It was likewise an important term for the false teachers. Paul used it here and in 1:19,25; 2:2,9–10; 4:12,17. It carries the idea of being fully equipped or controlled. Paul’s prayer then was for the Colossians to be controlled by the full knowledge of God’s will, which would lead to obedience and moral excellence.



Application: Knowing that spiritual understanding comes from the Lord and we ought to seek it out, what are some things we can do to uncover “the knowledge of his will” for our lives?

## 2. Paul’s Prayer for the Colossians (Colossians 1:10-11)

Paul listed many reasons that he prayed that the believers in Colossae would fully understand God’s Will for their lives in this passage. Let’s break it down.

**“So that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him”** (v. 10): Who are we living for? We’re all living to please someone. Many times, we live to please ourselves; Proverbs 14:12 warns us of the possible consequences of making this choice. Sometimes, we live to please other humans. However, Paul wrote and modeled that believers should be living and striving to please God (1 Corinthians 10:31; Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4).

When we live for others or ourselves, we live by the world’s standards, but God calls us to a higher standard: living for Him. As we grow spiritually and learn and embrace God’s will for our lives, we more deeply understand how and why to live to please the Lord and strive to reach a place where we are “fully” pleasing and glorifying Him. Though we never fully arrive at this place on our own, we grow in Christlikeness as we seek to please and glorify God.

**“Bearing fruit in every good work”** (v.10): When we walk with the Lord, we bear spiritual fruit. In other words, the Holy Spirit empowers us to live in ways that show evidence of our faith. Paul knew the Colossian believers were already bearing fruit (Colossians 1:6). When believers are fully rooted in the abundance of Jesus and walk in relationship with Him, we also bear fruit (John 15). God desires this and even works in our lives to help us bear even more fruit! Paul’s prayer for the Colossians was that they would bear fruit in every good work. This is a worthwhile prayer for every believer.



What does it mean to, “[bear] fruit in every good work”?

Paul’s note of “every good work” (emphasis added) is all-encompassing. We should strive to bear fruit not just in the things that are most natural, comfortable, prominent, popular, or convenient, but in all things. This begins to happen when we understand God’s will for our lives and daily seek to walk in it.

## “Growing in the knowledge of God” (v.10):

- What do you think Paul meant by this? How can we grow in the knowledge of God?

Paul’s statement here tells us that knowing God better comes with dedication over time. When we grow in the knowledge of God, we are loving God with our minds like Jesus commanded in Mark 12:30. Through this intentional act, we grow closer to the Lord, strengthen our faith, and learn more about His will for our lives.

But how? A couple of simple ways to work toward this are studying His Word and prioritizing prayer time. Paul recognized the importance of this in the life of every believer and prayed that the Colossian believers would grow in this way.

**“Being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might”** (v.11): The true strength of a believer to walk through the challenges of life comes not from our own gumption but from the Lord. We are new creations with the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of us! Thanks to His strength, we can face trials and persecution with peace, and choose joy when times are difficult. The more we grow spiritually, the more natural this becomes.


**“So that you may have great endurance and patience”** (v. 11): Believers aren’t guaranteed an easy life. In fact, Jesus said we would have troubles (John 16:33). In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul compared the Christian life to another activity that requires great endurance: running a race. Running a race requires us to push through when the going gets tough and we want to stop. A believer’s life takes the same kind of endurance and patience that a marathoner needs, and Paul knew that firsthand as he wrote this letter from prison.

- Application: Consider Paul’s prayer for the spiritual growth of the Colossian believers. What does this text teach us about our own spiritual growth and how we might better seek it?

## 3. Praise and Thanks (Colossians 1:12-14)

In these verses, Paul’s prayer for spiritual growth transitioned to praise and thanks. We see prayers of praise and thanks all over the pages of Scripture, and in Paul’s prayer was a request for the Colossian believers to joyfully give thanks to the Lord.

- How has God “enabled you to share in the saints’ inheritance in the light” (v.12)?


 Paul wrote, “He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (v. 13). What difference does this make for daily life?

The New Testament often speaks of nonbelievers walking in darkness while believers walk in the light. For example, 1 Peter 2:9 speaks of the Lord calling us “out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Before we knew Jesus and were still slaves to sin who lived in the dark under Satan’s dominion. But all who are in Christ have been rescued from this darkness and enjoy a different reality: We live in Jesus’s “marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9) under His authority and domain.

Paul said it beautifully in this passage: God rescued us from a life ruled by sin and darkness and, in His abundance grace, transferred our citizenship to Jesus’s eternal kingdom. Note who does the rescuing here—it’s not us! We live in the light and share in the inheritance of all believers thanks to the Lord’s divine rescue mission.

The “redemption” Paul wrote of in verse 14 reminds us that a steep price was paid for our salvation from sin and rescue into the kingdom of light: Jesus’s death on the cross.<sup>2</sup> Only in Jesus was this price was paid and our sins forgiven.

Remember that Paul wrote this epistle in response to the false teaching happening in Colossae. Paul, who dedicated his post-conversion life to the spread of the good news, was on a mission to correct any misconceptions about the true gospel. Scholars believe that some of the false teaching that plagued the Colossian church were Gnostic ideas. These false teachers used the analogy of light versus darkness and the concept of “redemption” in their false teaching.<sup>3</sup> Paul’s language here was strategic, and this is often how we see him approach evangelism and discipleship.

 Application: How has the Lord rescued you from darkness and brought you into light?

## Conclusion

- ❓ What might praying without stopping look like for us in 2025? How can we better adopt this attitude toward prayer? Consider what tools we can employ and what habits we can begin building.
- ❓ When have you experienced a pruning season? How did God use it to help you grow spiritually?
- ❓ Spiritual growth is important. Why should we pray for it? In what ways can we pray for and pursue our own spiritual growth this year?

### Prayer of Response

*Pray for spiritual growth that we might gain more knowledge of the Lord's will for our lives, and faithfully walk the path He has laid out for us.*

### Memory Verse

*For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. — Colossians 1:9*

### Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Colossians and Philemon* by Danny Akin
- *Philippians and Colossians* by J. Vernon McGee
- *Colossians & Philemon* by David Garland

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples





# Historical Context of Colossians

## Purpose

Paul wrote to counter the “Colossian heresy” that he considered an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The false teaching is identified as a “philosophy” (2:8), presumably drawn from some Hellenistic traditions as indicated by the references to “his fullness” (1:19); the “elements of the world” (Gk *stoicheia*, 2:8, 20); “wisdom” (2:3, 23); and “self-made religion” (2:23). In addition, the false teaching contained Jewish elements such as circumcision (2:11; 3:11); “human tradition” (2:8); Sabbath observance, food regulations, festival participation (2:16); the “worship of angels” together with “access to a visionary realm” (2:18); and harsh human regulations (2:21–23). Paul addressed this syncretistic philosophy by setting forth a proper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by noting appropriate implications for Christian conduct.

## Author

The Apostle Paul is identified as the author of Colossians (1:1; 4:18). The church fathers unreservedly endorsed Pauline authorship (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.14.1; Tertullian, *De Praescr. Haer.*, 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 1.1; cp. Justin, *Dialogue*, 85.2; 138.2). A close reading of Colossians reveals a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, and theological similarities with the other Pauline writings (1:9, 26; 2:11–14, 16, 20–21; 3:1, 3, 5–17). Also favoring the authenticity of Colossians as a letter of Paul is its close connection with Philemon, an epistle widely regarded as Pauline.

## Setting

During his ministry in Ephesus (Ac 19:10), Paul sent Epaphras to spread the gospel in the Lycus Valley. Epaphras subsequently established the church at Colossae (1:7; 4:12–13). The city’s population consisted mostly of Phrygians and Greeks, but it also included a significant number of Jews. The church, likewise, was mostly composed of Gentiles (1:21, 27; 2:13), but it also had Jewish members (2:11, 16, 18, 21; 3:11). When Epaphras (Phm 23) informed Paul of certain heretical teachings that had spread there, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians as a theological antidote.

## Special Features

Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae is one of the prison letters (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). Paul’s desire with this letter was to correct the false teachings that were cropping up in the church. In doing so, Paul presented a clear picture of Jesus Christ as supreme Lord of the universe, head of the church, and the only one through whom forgiveness is possible.

## Extended Commentary

### Colossians 1:9-14

1:9 The opening phrase for this reason harks back to Epaphras's good report about the Colossian believers' faith in Christ. The word filled (the passive verb indicates God as causal agent) typically conveys the sense of "completeness" in Colossians (vv. 9, 19, 25; 2:9–10; 4:17). Paul asked that they receive full knowledge of his will. The phrase in all wisdom and spiritual understanding expresses the means through which this knowledge comes. This wisdom (v. 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5) and understanding are spiritual in nature.

1:10–12 The purpose of Paul's prayer was that the believers at Colossae might walk worthy of the Lord so that all their conduct would please him. Christian behavior that pleases the Lord involves the performance of good deeds; continuous spiritual growth; dependence on his power resulting in endurance, patience, and joy; and expressing gratitude for all things because God enables believers to share in the saints' inheritance.

1:13–14 The reference to being rescued and transferred evokes OT imagery of God delivering his people from the grip of hostile oppressors (Ex 6:6; 14:30; Jdg 6:9; 8:34; Ps 18:19; 79:9; 86:14). Believers have been rescued from the realm of Satan's oppression (domain of darkness) by having been transferred to the realm of Christ, which is a kingdom "in the light" (v. 12). Redemption is the incalculable price paid for this deliverance and transfer. That price is nothing less than the blood of Christ shed on the cross. The result is forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and peace (1:20).<sup>4</sup>

## References

1. Mark Batterson, *Draw the Circle: The 40 Day Prayer Challenge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 47.
2. Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Colossians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1894.
3. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Colossians, 2024 Edition," Soniclight.com, accessed December 18, 2024, <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/colossians/colossians.htm>.
4. Köstenberger, "Colossians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, 1894.