

# Ambitious Prayer

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father.

We bring thanksgiving in prayer. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people, the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.

In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

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've not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and 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 giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

[ 2 : 1 0 ] For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Thank you, Lamont, for reading that for us. And if you could keep your Bibles open on page 1182, that would be a great help. We're on our first sermon in a series looking at this book, Colossians, so we'll flick around a little bit in the letter just to get to grips with it and get the most out of this morning.

I'm conscious as well, if you're normally someone who goes out for youth zone, maybe you're in here and thinking, oh, I wish my youth group was on. But I think, you know, stick with it.

If you get your Bible open, I think you'll find this really helpful. We're just going to see what it says and hear God speak to us. Now, you can find an outline in the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful, just to follow where we're going.

But most importantly, let me lead us in a prayer and let's ask for God's help as we turn to this portion of his word. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a speaking God, revealing your truth to us.

[ 3 : 2 1 ] And we ask that you will give each of us ears to hear and that more than informing our minds, by your spirit, your word will inflame our hearts.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, there are different ways to get scammed or conned in the world today. One is when people appeal to our fears.

You get a text, maybe you've had this, saying, from an unknown number, Hi, Dad, I'm stuck in Brazil and contacting you on my friend's phone.

I've lost my phone and all my money. Can you help me quickly by transferring £500 to this bank account? Fear. Another way we can get conned is when people appeal to our compassion.

I used to walk past a guy every day at a station who would say, Oh, sorry to bother you. I've lost my wallet and I need my bus fare to get home. Could you help me out? And one day I said to him, But you ask me this every day.

[ 4 : 23 ] And he said, I'm stuck again, mate. And sometimes people might try and scam us or con us by appealing to our ambition, our desire for things to be better.

And I'm not saying these are all scams, but when I get on YouTube, the ads that come up, Now, this might be something about me. I don't know why YouTube targets me with these adverts, but some of you might have this.

A slim fitness guru says, If your dinner plate looks like this, you are not going to lose weight. But if you subscribe to me and follow my plan, you're going to make progress.

Or there's a guy who sits at his piano and he says, If you've been struggling away with a piano teacher practicing, you're on the wrong track. Just give me 10 minutes a day and in three weeks you'll learn 300 songs.

Subscribe. Or there's a guy who's just sitting by his swimming pool and he says, You know, before I became a millionaire, I used to have to work full time.

[ 5 : 25 ] And then I learned that just by placing a few currency bets each morning at 9 o'clock, I can just sit here all day. And I can coach you if you just join my course and I'll give you my secret.

When we want things to be better for ourselves, it can make us susceptible, vulnerable to being led astray. And a similar thing can happen to you in the Christian life.

If you're here this morning and you're not really that bothered about the Christian life, you are in danger. Okay, you are probably in grave danger if you're not that bothered. But disturbingly, sometimes you can be in danger in the Christian life because you really want the right things.

Do you want more of God in your life? Do you want to grow? Do you want to become mature? These are vital things to want. But they can leave us open to being led astray, misled.

Now, we're starting a sermon series in this letter, Colossians, and we meet a young church that was in that kind of danger. The church is in Colossae. We're just going to put a map up on the screen.

[ 6 : 33 ] You can see that there. Sorry if it's not very clear. But this is the first century Roman Empire. You can see Italy on the left there. Just to the right of that, to the east, is modern-day Greece.

And over to the east of that is modern-day Turkey, which is then Asia Minor. And that bit there, the orange rectangle, is blown up for us. So you can see that from the west coast of what's now Turkey, you have places like Ephesus, a very prominent city.

And then you go upriver, up the Meander River, and you get to this area, the Lycus Valley, where there were a few cities, Hierapolis, Laodicea, and Colossae, where there was this church that received this letter.

Now in Colossae, people had heard the gospel, the message about Jesus. They'd heard it from a man called Epaphras. He'd heard it from the apostle Paul, probably in Ephesus, where Paul was in ministry and stayed some time.

And Epaphras hears the message. He becomes a Christian, and he goes back to his hometown, and he tells people the news about Jesus, and people believe it.

[ 7 : 41 ] And so a little church is born, probably a small church, probably meeting in someone's home. Wonderful. But you can imagine them thinking things like, did Epaphras get the whole thing right when he gave us the message?

And we've become Christians, but what do we do now while we're waiting for Jesus to return? How do we grow? And then one day, two men arrive, and they bring a scroll.

And on the scroll is this letter that we've got here from the apostle Paul himself, one of Jesus' chosen witnesses to the world. Paul is in prison, but if we just turn to the end of the letter, he tells us the circumstances in which they received the letter.

So chapter 4, verse 7, if you just have a look down there over the page, chapter 4, verse 7, Paul writes this, Tychicus will tell you all the news about me.

He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I'm sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.

[ 8 : 54 ] He is coming with Anisimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that's happening here. And what has made Paul get out of bed one morning in prison and decide, I've got a right to this church I've never met, is what he has heard from them.

He may have received a letter from them, or it may just be news from Anisimus, who came from them, and maybe Epaphras, who he explains in verse 12, is staying with Paul.

The news is that in their desire to grow, they are in deep danger of being led astray. In chapter 2, verse 4, Paul says about them, I'm telling you this so that no one may mislead you by fine-sounding arguments.

In chapter 2, verse 8, he says, see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy. Something is going on in Colossae.

In verse 16 of chapter 2, he says, don't let anyone judge you as a Christian. In verse 18, he says, don't let anyone disqualify you as a Christian. So there's something that has caused Paul to feel an urgency in getting this letter into their hands.

[ 10 : 14 ] And I think a key for his understanding what he wants them to get out of this letter is that he tells them in chapter 4 what Epaphras, who they know and trust, is praying for them.

So if you just have a look at chapter 4, verse 12, he says, Epaphras, who is one of you, when a servant of Christ Jesus sends greetings, he is always wrestling in prayer for you that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

They need to hear from Paul that they've got to stand firm in what they have heard about Christ and that in Christ they can grow to be mature so that they're not led astray from him.

And for us today, those dangers that the Colossians faced are very real, alarmingly real. Do we sometimes wonder if we're missing out on getting more of God when we hear what's happening in another church or about a special Christian conference or camp, when we talk to other Christians, maybe you're a student and you talk to other Christians in the CU and you hear things from them, or we find out there's a new course, a fresh course you can go away for with fresh new teaching.

Sometimes in these conversations, we'll be left wondering, am I stuck still on the first ladder of being a Christian? And am I missing out on what I need to get up the ladder and grow?

[ 11 : 48 ] So let's get into the letter. We've got two simple points this morning, just coming straight from chapter one. The first one is, Paul continually gives thanks for their genuine gospel growth.

Just imagine, you are a member of that little house church in Colossae, how reassuring you would have found it when it was read out to you, this letter, and you read verse three.

Paul the apostle says to them, we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. And he picks out three vital things that make him so thankful.

The first is faith, verse four, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus. Their faith in Christ has saved them.

It's made them right with God. Next, the evidence of that faith in a new attitude to other Christians, verse four, we thank God because of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people.

[ 12 : 50 ] These were a people who because of their faith in Jesus, they've started showing up to church and they're using their time and their talents and their money and gifts to serve and love other Christians.

And love like that is a key mark that their faith in Jesus is genuine. And then the third thing in verse five, the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven.

They've got confidence for the future because of God's glorious promises. For the future with him. Faith, love and hope.

Paul wants the Colossians to hear that here are the key marks of being right with God, of being one of God's people. And those key marks come from a right response to the message about Jesus.

Paul's message, if we pick things up again in verse five. He says of their hope, halfway through verse five, about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.

[ 13 : 56 ] In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

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.

In other words, Colossians, be deeply reassured because the gospel has done so much for you. The message about Jesus that he is God's Messiah, his appointed rescuing king who died for your sins and is now risen to rule, that news is bearing fruit everywhere.

And what Epaphras told you, he was dead right. Notice in verse five, it's the true message of the gospel. And that, it's not just whatever is true is true for you, as sometimes people think these days about areas of faith.

It's not just my truth or your truth. It's the truth, true truth, things that really happened about Jesus, God's truth that you can build your life on.

[ 15 : 10 ] So there are some powerful forces in the world today. If you think about gravity, gravity is a powerful force when you walk along the coast and you look at the oceans, gravity pulling them around the world in the tides.

Gravity keeps us on the ground. We hear about wind, how powerful the force of wind is. Three weeks ago, the storm of the century in Florida, in Tampa, Hurricane Milton, millions of people had to evacuate Tampa.

But the most powerful force in the world today is the gospel. The news about Jesus. You share it with someone and if they put their faith in it, their life and their eternal future are completely transformed.

And for all of us who are Christians here this morning, at some point in your life, you caught the gospel train because there was an epaphras, somebody was epaphras for you.

There's someone you can thank God for who shared with you that they followed Jesus. And many of us have known ourselves, sacrifices that we've made to get that message known to others so that it's bearing fruit here at St. Silas and bearing fruit around the world.

[ 16 : 29 ] But let's be reassured by these verses that it's worth it. It's worth sacrificing yourself to make this message known. We're planting a church next year, God willing, in the east end of Glasgow.

Tim and Lauren are coming from Sydney to live 24 hours from their parents with their two little girls. So in January, they'll say goodbye.

We all say, oh, they're saying goodbye to the Sydney weather to come and live in the east end of Glasgow. What bothers them is they're saying goodbye to their parents who will say goodbye to their little granddaughters to come and live 24 hours away.

Why would you do that? Well, if it's just whatever's true is true for you, it's not worth it, is it? But this is God's truth and it saves people.

And so it's worth it. It's worth Tim and Lauren making that sacrifice to come and live in Glasgow on the other side of the world that others would hear about Jesus. And it does so much, this message.

[ 17 : 31 ] And we can be assured, reassured this morning, it's the news about Jesus that transforms your eternity. It makes you established. We don't need anything else.

That's our first point. Paul continually gives thanks for genuine gospel life. But if they've made such a good start, what now? What do they do now?

Well, that's our second point. Paul continually prays for full gospel growth. Now, these next verses are extraordinarily important.

For me, I can't think of a more valuable prayer in the whole Bible to sum up what I long for for this church, for St. Silas. We looked at this prayer in our Vision Sunday last year.

And as God shows us what to pray for, for Christians, because he tells us what Paul was praying for Christians he'd never met, he holds out for us a picture of Christian maturity.

[ 18 : 31 ] This is what it looks like to be a mature Christian. If we pick things up in verse 9, the Apostle Paul says, for this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

Now, just pause there for a moment before we look at the prayer and just think about that. Notice, the Apostle Paul is praying without ceasing. Why? For this reason.

What was the reason? Because things are going so well. Isn't that extraordinary? This is a let's make hay while the sun shines kind of prayer.

Often, we're spurred on to pray for other people because we hear things are going really badly. Isn't that what drives us to pray for people? Well, the Apostle Paul also makes time to pray because things are going well.

And essentially, what does he pray for? It's one thing and it's in verse 9. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.

[ 19 : 39 ] So the prayer here is for knowledge. knowledge of God's will which here is not you know, when you've got a big decision in life where do I live?

What job should I do? Should I move flats? Should I get married? Who should I marry? Those kind of big decisions. When we're doing those big decisions in life we will often say things like I'd love to know God's will and we'll pray prayers asking God to help us discern his will to give us wisdom to make these decisions where often he's given us freedom but we want wisdom to do what is helpful and beneficial.

Here though Paul is praying that they will grow in the knowledge of God's plan. The unfolding will of God through human history that is centered on his son Jesus Christ.

We can see that because the key words he uses here deliberately are knowledge, wisdom and understanding in this verse. And in chapter 2 verse 2 he says you find all those things in Christ.

He says the full riches of complete understanding are in Christ. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Christ. So as he prays that God would fill them with wisdom, knowledge and understanding by his spirit as they know the will of God it's God's plan for the world in Christ that he wants them to be filled with.

[ 21 : 10 ] In Ephesians chapter 1 Ephesians is like a sister letter to this one and in Ephesians chapter 1 God tells us about that his will for the world and it's to bring everything back together under his son the Lord Jesus as people hear the gospel message about him.

So Paul prays that this young church will be filled with a deeper knowledge of that plan and as Christians grow in that knowledge it has breathtaking results.

So look at verse 10 that they would be filled with a knowledge of God's will verse 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way and then he's going to break that down for us in the rest of the verses a long sentence isn't it but it's to think what's it going to look like to live a life worthy of the Lord a life that pleases the Lord and the first two things he says give us knowledge again if you look there he says bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God what they need to know and what we need to know is that the way on in the Christian life is the same as the way in the way in is the way on it's growing in your knowledge of Christ that's how you become mature in the Christian life you grow in what you have in Christ and so in a healthy church we shouldn't be ashamed to say a key aim in our church life in our ministry in our activities is that our knowledge of God in Christ grows and abounds when we focus on that as a church so often people think we're missing out people think people criticize people say things like it's all head and no heart it's intellectualized at that church we're treated like brains on sticks there and of course those are dangers that we want to avoid we certainly don't want knowledge for knowledge's sake knowledge that makes us proud and we don't want the Christian faith to become intellectual in a way that would make it less accessible it's accessible for everyone but as we prayed in my opening prayer and often pray we want to hear from God on a Sunday to inform our minds and inflame our hearts with what we hear and so as we walk into church are we seeking knowledge we should be praying that God would fill us today as you walk into church

God would you fill me with a knowledge of your unfolding plan for the world in Christ that's what I need to hear whatever's going on in my life not for knowledge's sake but because that knowledge will naturally lead to a fruitful life a life that pleases God so that's knowledge and we've got care for knowledge here because this is such an important prayer we've got a memory aid that I got from someone else right that we're going to use this morning we've got a K an F and then a C okay and the reason we've got those three letters is so that wherever you go in life wherever you are if you just happen to see somewhere a sign that has those three letters on somewhere K KFC let that be your prompt to think ah I've remembered something from church I'm meant to pray a prayer now for me and for my church KFC K is for knowledge the F is for fortitude okay

I had to look it up this is what fortitude means fortitude is the strength to bear trials with courage fortitude the strength to bear adversity with courage and we see that's exactly what Paul is praying for in verse 11 as a mark of the mature Christian have a look at verse 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience I don't know what you think about that but I think this is an astonishing verse if you think about this if you just covered up the last seven words and you read up to the so that it's a shock just think if you were strengthened with all power according to the glorious might of God the living God so that what do you think you could pray for there we might think Paul would say so that there are many miracles among you of healing or so that there is an end to poverty and homelessness all around you in your neighbourhood because of God's power at work in you or we might think he'd say so that everyone around you becomes a Christian through that power and then we get there and Paul essentially says all that glorious power of the living God is needed at work in you so that you'll keep going as a Christian endurance why?

[ 26 : 27 ] because life is hard isn't it and the Christian life can be especially hard affliction grief unjust suffering sickness persecution seasons of spiritual darkness and just in the last three weeks I've had numerous conversations with Christians where when they've talked to me about what's been going on in their lives it's obvious to me that it is a miracle of God that they are still Christians if you're finding the Christian life hard take comfort Paul is saying here it is hard I pray for God's extraordinary power his glorious might to be at work in your heart that you would endure he says to them tragically we also see the need for this prayer from things going the other way as well when people don't endure and I can think of the adult children of Christians the adult children of ministers of missionaries of committed servant-hearted

Christians godly people and their kids grew up and they were baptized and they prayed and they called God their heavenly father and they haven't endured so we must pray we must pray for ourselves for the people in our small groups I hope we pray this prayer for them for our church family for our youth and children week by week in our church for our mission partners that God would strengthen them to keep going to endure to have patience and endurance by his glorious power KFC knowledge fortitude thirdly cheerfulness verse 12 and giving joyful thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light and then the apostle Paul reminds us that whatever we're facing in life however hard it is we always have reason to be joyful and thankful in verse 13 if you have a look for he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins now this prayer this mark of Christian maturity this is TJ Maxx so you know the shops

TK Maxx in America they're actually called TJ Maxx I don't know if it's because of this verse probably not but when you see TK Maxx you're to think oh yeah Christian life TJ Maxx thanksgiving and joy overflowing that's the mark of the mature Christian and Paul reminds us here of why he tells us something about our past something about our future something about our present our future in verse 12 he says you've been qualified by God to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light qualified and some of you will know the feeling of trying to get qualified in life trying to get a qualification that would get you a job some of you will know the feeling of going for a job and being told you just weren't qualified enough well the living God says of you in Christ you're qualified for an inheritance that I'm keeping for you in the kingdom of light that's your future and then your past you were in the dominion of darkness it was a hostage situation where I went to university on my staircase just down a floor from where I from my room there was a rescued hostage he'd been in Beirut taken hostage he'd just been freed they were letting him stay there just to recover imagine that imagine being taken hostage being held in a darkened room not knowing if you'd ever get free and then one night you hear in the distance the low hum of rotor blades from a helicopter and it's getting louder and louder and you realise it's coming for you and the helicopter lands outside and a brave soldier bursts in and he breaks the chains that are tying you up and he says don't be afraid

I'm taking you home and he carries you because you're so weak to the helicopter and you're brought back to safety Paul says if you're a Christian that is your story you were trapped in the dominion of darkness you had no hope of release and you've been rescued when you heard the gospel message you were brought into the kingdom of Christ the kingdom of light as that message came to you that was your past and then your present verse 14 in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins you live your life knowing that you've been set free from the penalty of sin no condemnation now you've been set free from the power of sin so that you can live for God you're a child of the living God everything you've ever done wrong is forgiven so we have every reason to be cheerful to rejoice and give thanks

KFC do you want to be mature? are you looking for more in your Christian life? Paul says get it from Christ don't be led away from him instead pray asking God to grow you in knowledge of Christ a knowledge that grips your heart and overflows from you in a fruitful life where God's strength gives you fortitude so that you can keep going and cheerfulness because you have so much to rejoice in let's pray together Father God we thank you for and we rejoice in the gospel message about Christ a message about Jesus that has given us hope for you have qualified us to share in the kingdom of light a message of our rescue from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of your son a message that is bearing fruit here in our church family and each of us thanks you personally for the people in our lives who have been a path for us to us thank you for them and their courage and their faithfulness would we be like that for others we ask Father that you would fill us with the knowledge of your will by your spirit that we might walk in a manner worthy of you would you grant us endurance and patience by the strength of your power in us and thanksgiving and joy for the glory of Jesus name

[ 33 : 31 ]    Amen Amen