

Colossians 1:1-14

Week 1 - Steadfast Prayer (Prayer, part I)

Learning Objectives

- Recognize Paul's example of encouragement and prayer
- Consider ways to build up one another amidst differing circumstances and levels of spiritual maturity

Icebreaker

This week, we're starting a series in Colossians. Colossians was written as a letter to the church in Colossae by the Apostle Paul. The letter, written in Rome, had to travel 1300+ miles before its eventual delivery in Colossae. As in so many of his letters, Paul made sure to balance teaching and correction with a helping of grace and encouragement. The significance of his approach, along with the importance of a reliable messenger, is summed up in the following video:

Alfalfa's letter to Darla (Little Rascals) -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2ONM6n7avA>

Colossae was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus in what is now Turkey. It was part of an important trade route, which served as the catalyst for its multi-cultural, cosmopolitan atmosphere. Although the population was overwhelmingly Gentile, there was a significant Jewish population as well. Paul had not yet visited Ephesus when he wrote this letter during his first Roman imprisonment. The tone of his letter stands in stark contrast to his circumstances, offering unflagging encouragement and sound teaching.

Source: bible.org

Colossians 1:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

² To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

? What does it mean to be an "apostle"?

Possible Answer: The Greek word apostolos means "one sent forth." Luke uses the term almost exclusively to refer to the twelve disciples of Jesus, who saw Christ and were appointed by him directly to spread the news of his kingdom.

Leader's Note: We will see Paul use the term more generally, referring most often to individuals who had been appointed by Christ to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

Colossians 1:3-8 (NIV)

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— ⁵ 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 ⁶ 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. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

? In verse 6, Paul mentions the growth of the gospel throughout the whole world. How is this an encouragement to the church in Colossae?

Possible Answer: It’s always good to know that you’re not alone, especially when you’ve made a momentous, life-changing decision. Paul encourages the church by letting them know that the gospel they’ve put their faith in is growing all over the world. Their experience of Christ is not restricted or isolated to their area. It’s not a fad. It’s growing meaningfully and rapidly.

? What is the significance of Paul’s mention of Epaphras?

Possible Answer: By noting Epaphras as a faithful and dear fellow servant, Paul affirmed him as a trusted voice for Colossae. Epaphras taught the believers about God’s grace, and Paul is lifting him up as a “faithful minister.” In a new church like this one, many false truths and teachers could arise, but Paul assures the church that the teaching they received from Epaphras could be trusted.

? What other encouragement can you find in verses 3-8?

Possible Answer: It’s almost a trick question - it’s all encouragement! Paul actively thanks God for this church (v. 3). He applauds the believers’ faith and their love for all God’s people (v. 4). Paul reminds them their hope is in heaven - it can’t be taken from them (v. 5). Verse 6 as addressed above. In verses 7-8, Paul shares that he heard of the church’s faith through Epaphras, a trusted believer who knows the church well.

? Can you remember a time someone encouraged you early in your faith? What did they say or do?

Possible Answer: Answers will vary: They drove me to church when I didn’t have a car, they answered my questions or gave me resources, they corrected me graciously.

Colossians 1:9-14 (NIV)

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have 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, ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 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. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

? In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul writes: “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” How does this passage in his letter to the Colossians relate to his words for the church in Thessalonica?

Possible Answers: Paul specifically says he has not stopped praying for the church in Colossae (v.9), and whenever he does, he gives thanks for their faith and love (v. 3). He is in prison as he writes this letter, giving weight to the idea of, “giving thanks in all circumstances.” Paul can rejoice over and give thanks for the believers even though his circumstances are difficult.

? In what circumstances do you find it most difficult to encourage others?

Possible Answers: Answers will vary: When I’m stressed; when I’m in need of encouragement myself; when they’re being unreasonable or difficult to love.

? Paul refers to each part of the Trinity in verses 9-14. What does he attribute to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and why is this significant?

Possible Answers: The Holy Spirit gives wisdom and understanding to believers (v. 9) and empowers them to live lives worthy of the Lord (v. 10). God the Father is the one who qualifies believers as citizens of his kingdom (v. 12). God the Son is the ruler of that kingdom and the reason we have redemption (v. 14). This is significant because Paul does not stop at encouraging the Colossians, but teaches them sound theology at the same time.

? How can we follow the example of Paul in this passage as we walk through life with other Christians?

Possible Answers: Recognize that God’s will for us is to pray, rejoice and give thanks no matter our own circumstances. We can always encourage one another, even in the midst of our own struggles. We don’t have to stick to surface-level encouragement - we can remind each other of sound theology as we build one another up.

For Discussion and Accountability

? Who in your life is God calling you to pray for and/or encourage this week?

? What gospel truths/passages of scripture can you turn to when circumstances inevitably overwhelm your ability to encourage and pray for those around you?