

Continue to live in Christ

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

But savour it, enjoy it, praise God for it, thank God for it, and ponder how it's best put into practice, and then pray that God will help you do it.

Do you know, remember Psalm 1, blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night.

So I used to say to young couples at St. Jude's, this is back many years ago, it might be better not to read a new passage of the Bible every day, but to read one passage and then talk about it and meditate on it and pray through it for the next week.

[1 : 47] So you're making the most of it. I remember visiting a friend of mine and they had something called a blackboard. Do you know what a blackboard is? It's like a whiteboard, except that, as you might have guessed, it's black anyway.

He and his wife had a blackboard next to their kitchen table and on it was the Bible verse for the week, which they talked about at breakfast, lunch and dinner 21 times.

And I bet by the first time the children had remembered the Bible verse. What a great thing to do.

So, remember this, not just for the earthly rewards, but for the eternal usefulness. So then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

And understand this, you've heard this, but I just remind you, if you have trusted Christ for salvation, then you are in him. And if you are in him, you also died and rose again with him.

[3 : 12] And so receive from him the power to put your sins to death and clothe yourself in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, forbearance, forgiveness and love.

And so, if you do this, you'll do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

And as I've said a few times, I love turning the Bible into prayers. So, I've done that with our memory verses 2, 6 and 7.

This is a prayer you can pray for yourself. Heavenly Father, as I have received Christ Jesus as Lord, please help me and so on.

Or you can pray it for your church, which would be a great thing to do. Heavenly Father, as we have received Christ Jesus as Lord. So, let's pray it together for our church now.

[4 : 12] Heavenly Father, as we have received Christ Jesus as Lord, please help us to continue to live our lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthen the faith as we have been taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

In the name of Christ our Saviour. Amen. Amen. What a great prayer to pray every day for a week. Or a month. Or even a year.

Or, indeed, a lifetime. Which is not as long as it used to be. When you were young. So, remember this, understand this, pray this, do this.

God speaks to us through the Bible for ourselves. And God also speaks to us through the Bible that we might teach and admonish and share with others with all wisdom.

So that, in one of the great 316s of the Bible, Colossians 3:16, the message of Christ will dwell richly among us. So, every time you hear a sermon or a Bible talk, ask God to give you an opportunity to share what you've learnt with somebody else.

[5 : 33] And I'm sure God will answer that prayer with a yes. It needn't be a very deep and long conversation.

You might just say, here's a great verse I've been thinking about. I'd like to share it with you. It's been so important for me. That's a great thing to do. Encourage others with the truths of God. Try this. I'll get a Thanksgiving and praise notebook. You can always get a 2023 diary cheaply because the year's nearly over as far as I can see.

Each night, write down five gifts of God you've received today. Blessings of creation, like air, for example, or salvation, like Christ, for example. Thank and praise God for them and ask Him to alert you tomorrow for another five gifts for you to write down tomorrow night so that you can thank and praise Him for them.

This is one way in which you might encourage yourself to overflow with thankfulness. Overflow is an odd word to use, isn't it?

[6 : 46] I always think that's a disaster when something overflows. The pumpkin soup overflows on the stove or something like that. Or the toilet overflows, but this is a good overflowing. Thankfulness overflowing is to be encouraged, not discouraged.

Well, thank you for your patience. Learn this. What is God's big plan? What is the gospel?

We often think of the gospel in terms of God's love for me, God's love for you, and that's certainly an implication of the gospel, but if you think about it, most times in the New Testament, the gospel's described.

It's described in terms of something bigger than you or me. So, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.

Or, Christ laid down His life for the sheep, not one sheep, but lots of sheep. The sheep there meaning lots of sheep.

[7 : 57] And then He said, I've got more sheep as well. So, we need to remember that the gospel is not just about us and our salvation, me and my salvation.

It's about God's global gospel plan to create His church, to bring the message of Christ's death and resurrection for our sin to the whole world.

And that, I think, is the really important background to the whole letter, and particularly to this last section. So, devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful, that is alert when you pray, and thankful when you pray.

Alert to what prayer needs there are, and thankful because you can come to God at any time, with any need, and God will hear your prayer.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful, and pray for gospel growth, and for opportunities to name drop Jesus. Verses 2-6.

[9 : 06] Paul says, devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful, and pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery, the revealed mystery of Christ, he says, for which I am in chains.

Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. So, he's been talking about his own efforts to share the message of Christ's death and resurrection around the world, the Roman world, that is.

But then he talks about their own responsibility. Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation always be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

I heard a sermon recently, and someone talked about opportunities to name drop Jesus, and I thought that was a great expression for what we should be doing, dropping Jesus into the conversation.

You might notice, by the way, that verse 6 implies that we'll be answering questions rather than having a set script to say.

[10 : 26] That is, it'll be responsive to people's questions. So, it might be what you do over the weekend, when you could say, I went to church, or you could say, I went to worship Jesus.

Why would you do that? And you're off. Well, what about the final greetings?

I love the heading final greetings and further instructions. It sounds so tedious, doesn't it? And I think, actually, this last section is the climax of the letter.

Do you remember in chapter 1, Paul was rejoicing that the true message of the gospel has come to you, and then he says, in the same way the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world.

Well, that should bring great joy to the Colossians, shouldn't it? As it brings great joy to Paul. He means, of course, the Roman world. For Paul has a gospel team of 80 fellow workers bringing the

true message of the gospel to the Roman world.

[11 : 43] When I was young, I used to think that Paul was a kind of solo hero, and then I read a book by Paul Barnett, which pointed out that Paul had 80 fellow workers.

I tried to count up and I got to 81, but the last maths exam I did, I got 5 out of 100, so I suspect that his edition was probably more accurate than mine, but it's heaps anyway.

And Paul expects, this is not just final greetings, this is Paul expecting that the Christians in Colossae will be interested, excited, and prayerful about the progress of the gospel all around the world.

That's what he expects. Well, Tychicus, he was obviously a very small man, will tell you all the news about me, so travelling.

And in this case, the people who carried the letter to the Colossians from Paul were Tychicus and Onesimus. Tychicus is one of Paul's team and we read about him in Acts chapter 20 and in 2 Timothy chapter 4 and in Titus chapter 3.

[13 : 24] And he lived nearby to Colossae, he lived in what's called Asia, which means the western province, Roman province in Turkey, doesn't mean Singapore, it means Turkey in the western bit.

So he lived near Colossae and Laodicea and Ephesus. And notice what he is to do, I'm sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.

And I think it's just beautiful that Paul not only writes his letter, but also sends a messenger to give them more, if you like, personal information about what's happening to Paul and his friends and also to encourage them.

That is, Paul wants to be an encouragement to the Colossians, he wants them to encourage each other and he sends Titicus all that way in order to encourage them.

And he's coming with Onesimus our faithful and dear brother who is one of you, that is, who comes from Colossae, they will tell you everything that's happening here.

[14 : 46] Well, if you've ever read the little letter of Philemon, you'll know that Onesimus was a slave who had run away from his owner, Philemon, had become a Christian under Paul's ministry, ministry, and Paul was sending him back, and if you read Paul's letter to Philemon, you'll see that he's encouraging Philemon not to be cross with Onesimus, but to welcome him to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love.

I appeal to you for my son Onesimus who became my son while he was in charge, that is, Paul converted him. Formerly he was useless to you when he ran away, but now he's become useful both to you and to me.

I'm sending him, Onesimus, who is my very heart, back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so he could take your place in helping me while I'm in chains for the gospel.

But I don't want to do anything without your consent so that any favour you do would not seem forced, but would be voluntary. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you was that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.

He is very dear to me, but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

[16 : 37] If he's done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I'll pay you back. I wish brother that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord.

Refresh my heart in Christ. Isn't that amazing? What an amazing story. The converted slave returned to his owner with Paul begging the owner not to treat him as a slave, but as a dear brother. What a massive transformation in society in the Roman world where there was a big gap between slaves and owners. And how wonderful of Paul to be sending his letter with Onesimus, the slave, the former slave, the new convert, as one of the people who's carrying the letter.

So he's giving Onesimus a responsibility of ministry, you see, and expecting the church at Colossae to welcome Onesimus as a spokesperson for Paul.

What a wonderful transformation is happening in this little corner of the Roman Empire. Well, Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings.

[17 : 59] So we know Paul's in prison. We know that he's in chains. Aristarchus is there. Aristarchus was a Macedonian or a Greek, and we read about him in Acts 19, 20 and 27.

He sends his greetings as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. You've received instructions about him. If he comes to you, welcome him. Well, if you know your Bibles well, you remember that Mark was with Barnabas and Paul on one of their missionary journeys, and then Paul decided that Mark wasn't up to the job, so Paul and Barnabas disagreed, and Paul went off with Silas, and Barnabas and Mark went off together.

So it's wonderful that Paul has formally regarded Mark as an unreliable person, but now he's speaking of his value to him.

Mark, who is the cousin of Barnabas, and now restored as one of Paul's fellow workers. Jesus, that's not Jesus Christ whom you know, it's another one, who is called Justice also sends greetings. Presumably he was called Justice so people knew they weren't praying to him, but to the Lord Jesus when they prayed. And then the really sad comment in verse 11, these are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.

[19 : 42] Well, if you remember Paul's words in Romans chapter 9, he's in anguish because so few Jews are converted to Christ. So what a comfort to at least have three fellow workers who are Jews who've become Christians.

Christians. Then Epaphras, we met Epaphras in chapter 1. I hope you remember meeting him. Paul talked about the day they heard the true gospel and understood God's grace.

Colossians 1 7, you learnt 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.

Well, Epaphras is now with Paul and he sends greetings to his friends, the people he converted back in Colossae. And notice what Paul says about him in verse 12, he is always wrestling in prayer for you.

Some people like to think of prayer as a kind of relaxation exercise. But for Paul and for Epaphras, prayer is more like wrestling, hard work, the hard work of praying.

[21 : 03] And what is Epaphras praying? That you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. Well, that reminds me of Paul's words in chapter two.

I want you to know how hard I'm contending for you and those at Laodicea. my goal is that they may be encouraged in heart, united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Friends, notice, what Paul is writing, Epaphras is praying. Isn't that wonderful? and the work of God goes forward when someone is speaking and someone is praying.

And that's, I think, a thing we need to remember in our churches, to pray for those who teach our children, and to pray for those who teach young people, and pray for those who teach us as well, in our Bible study group, or here in church.

And I vouch for him, for Epaphras, that he's working hard for you, and those in Laodicea and Hierapolis, three little towns near each other.

[22 : 44] Laodicea was the most important one. Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, of course, the author of Luke and Acts, and another one of Paul's fellow workers, and Demas send greetings.

Well, there's a bit of sadness, actually, in verse 14, because if you look at 2 Timothy chapter 4, you'll discover that Demas, who was one of Paul's 80, has now deserted him and given up his gospel ministry.

history. So, it even happened in those days. By the way, Mark, of course, mentioned in verse 10, is the author of Mark's gospel, and Luke, mentioned in verse 14, is the author of Luke and Acts.

So, remarkably, we've got quite a few New Testament writers gathered together in this chapter. give my greetings, and now all these people are sending greetings.

Now, give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, to Nympha and the church in her house, and then, as a wonderful act of fellowship, after this letter has been read to you, see that it's read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you, in turn, read the letter from Laodicea, that is, the letter that Paul wrote to the Laodicean church, and that enables somebody to ask a question, what happened to that letter?

[24 : 17] I can tell you the answer, I don't know, but you can ask it again later on if you want to.

Archippus, who's actually one of the workers employed by Philemon, he also has a ministry in the church in Colossae, tell Archippus, see that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.

He's one of the householders Philemon, as you'll see in Philemon verse 2. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, remember my chains, he's in prison, and then the words with which Paul always ends his letters, grace be with you.

now I love preaching on lists of names in the Bible because people listed who are not from our point of view very important people, but they're not someone like Paul or St.

Peter or someone like that. But God even includes, how can I put this, ordinary people and their names in the Bible.

Isn't that lovely? so I can read through Ezra chapter 2 and read names, I have no idea who they were, but how wonderful that God includes ordinary people in his Bible, and that the names of people like us are in the Lamb's book of life, and that people like us, God uses our lives and our words and our deeds for his glory.

[26 : 12] I love saying, and I've said it twice already to other people this week, that God is such a good housekeeper that nothing is wasted in his economy. No good deed, no prayer, no patience, no endurance, no suffering, nothing is wasted by God.

He uses it all for his glory. glory. So that shows how much God loves ordinary people like us. We're made in his image, we're being transformed into the image of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, from one degree of glory to another.

Christ died for us, we are temples of God's Holy Spirit, God uses our lives and our prayers and our good deeds and our sacrifices and our patience and our love for his glory as well as for the good of others.

well I think we live in an era of small prayers. I belong to a Bible study group at my home church at St.

Jude's and I love the people there but I notice that when we come to the prayer time we tend to pray for small things, important things.

[27 : 51] Most of us are my age so they're small but important things are mostly medical appointments and we seem to have about five a week each or something like that. But we should be and it's good to pray for small things.

We're told to pray in the Lord's prayer for our daily bread. And God loves hearing little prayers that little children pray. But we should also be praying big things as well.

So I want to ask you if the prayers in this church and your own prayers are about God's great gospel plan for the whole world.

Are you praying for family and friends and neighbors to become Christians? Are you inviting people to church to learn about Jesus? do you support the evangelism being done by your church?

Have you joined a missionary society such as the church and missionary society or any other one you know? And are you giving generously and praying generously for the missionaries of that society?

[29 : 12] people and are you praying that God will raise up workers for his wonderful worldwide gospel harvest? We should have a concern not only for our own welfare but also for the welfare of the world.

Now we're told by the media again and again that we should be doing practical things to help our world and so we should. But if we're believers in Christ and if we believe that God so loved the world that he gave his only son then we should have a worldwide vision and worldwide prayers as well.

It should matter to us whether the gospel of Jesus Christ is going to every place in this world. world. I heard the figures I think it was what seven billion people in the world not that I've counted them but seven billion people in the world and I think it's two billion have no access to knowledge about Jesus Christ or a Bible or a Christian.

That's two out of every seven isn't it? So I've got a little prayer for you to pray.

It's taken from chapter one. May the gospel of Jesus Christ bear fruit and grow over all the world and then I've left space for you to put in your especially's because it's great to pray a big prayer but let's think about this.

[31 : 05] I live in Carlton so I'm including especially in Carlton through the church I belong to and then I pray for missionaries in the Northern Territory and Timor Leste and in Japan and in Sri Lanka other places as well but I want to name the places where I'm praying for the work of the gospel.

And sometimes when we pray for missionaries we pray for their personal needs and that's a good thing to do if the budgerigar escaped well let's pray that little Freddy comes back again with more feathers than ever but let's also pray for the ministry that the people are doing and for the growth of the church in that place.

Let's pray big prayers for the reason they've gone there the reason they've gone there is not to recover their budgerigar it's to train future leaders or translate the Bible or serve in a church or work with young people or whatever it is let's pray for that gospel growth and be committed to praying for it.

So I want you to pray the Colossians 2, 6 and 7 prayer but I also want you to put this prayer into your daily prayers if it's not already there.

May the gospel of Jesus Christ bear fruit and grow all over the world especially in Doncaster and in and you can fill in the rest yourselves.

[32 : 50] Let's pray that prayer now leaving out the specialties. May the gospel of Jesus Christ bear fruit and grow all over the world in Jesus name.

Amen.