

# What to Pray for the Church

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Colossians chapter 2. I'm reading at the beginning.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ, and so on.

This is quite an interesting letter that we have from the Apostle Paul as he writes to the church in Colossae. And one of the reasons why it's interesting is that this is a church that he had never actually met.

Paul had been to Corinth, he had been to Rome, he had been to Ephesus, he had been to Philippi, he had written these churches, which is understandable, but he had never actually been to Colossae.

[ 1 : 32 ] So that's what makes this letter somewhat different. And I think one of the great things about this, as we look through it, is Paul's prayer for people that he had never actually met.

Colossae was probably about 100 miles inland from Ephesus, and in the early days was a very prosperous place. But as time went on, it became less and less prosperous, and in fact it became more like a big town rather than a city as time went by.

But Paul had heard plenty about the faith of the Christians of Colossae. It's believed that the church in Colossae began through the witness of some of the people from Colossae who had been at Ephesus at the time when Paul was preaching there.

Certainly one of the leaders in the church in Colossae, a man, Epaphras, had been in Ephesus at the time of Paul, and of course people came under the influence of Paul's preaching and also the influence of others who were in Ephesus at the time and who were converted.

And then they went back to their own place, and they began to speak and to share the gospel, and others were converted as well. And that's how the gospel works.

[ 3 : 01 ] Because God works in this way, in where he uses us all. We are all parts of a link, or links, I should say, in a chain.

You may be looking over your Christian life today, and you say to yourself, you know, I can't think of anything really worthwhile or anything that I've ever really done that seems to have promoted the gospel, that have I ever really been used by the Lord.

Well, I believe that as a Christian that you have. I believe that every single believer is used by the Lord in his own place or her own place.

The one thing that the Lord asks us is that we be faithful where we are. You look at, for instance, Andrew of the disciples. Andrew never had a great name with the disciples.

He was not one of the inner three. Yes, he was one of the twelve, but he was not one of the inner three. We read loads about Peter. He was so influential. He was such a powerful disciple.

[ 4 : 06 ] We read loads about John and James. They were all what seemed to be at the forefront. But Andrew was one of those who seemed to be in the background. And yet it was Andrew that introduced Peter to Jesus.

It was Andrew who took Peter to Jesus. And see the impact. Thousands and thousands of people were converted through Peter's preaching, and yet it's Andrew who brought Peter to Jesus.

And that's the way it works. Some people, the Lord, will use powerfully and mightily and in a much more open way. Other people, he uses them where they are in a quiet way.

So we've always got to remember that we are part of, God is using us, and sometimes we don't realize it. But God will use his people in their own place, and he will make sure that his word will work through them.

And that's exactly what had happened here in Colossae. And so Paul is telling them here that he is having this incredible struggle for them.

[ 5 : 20 ] The end of the, verse 29 of chapter 1, For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

And now in verse 1 he says, For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those in Laodicea. And there's no doubt here that as Paul is struggling, part of his struggle is in prayer.

Now, some people don't think that there's any great struggle in prayer. Well, if you don't think there's a great struggle in prayer, then you don't know what prayer is. There are times we can't help but prayer.

And prayer, there are times prayer is easy. And when I say it's easy, it's easy in the respect, in this respect, is that we have to pray. That there's just this burden upon us to pray.

We're being pushed on to pray. But often prayer is a struggle. And every Christian will say that. As you go through your Christian life, you will look back and you'll say, you know, one of the things that I have struggled with is prayer.

[ 6 : 29 ] The discipline, just take it in the one area, is the discipline of every day of setting aside time to pray. That is a struggle in itself. And you and I know even when we set aside time to pray, it's almost inevitable that things will take us away from it.

We'll be distracted. Somebody will come. The phone will go. You can absolutely guarantee that something will come to try and stop you praying. It's always the case.

That's why some people get up earlier and they say, well, it's the only time I can get. Or they'll go away somewhere into some wee secluded spot. In fact, that's why Jesus says, when you pray, go into your wee room, go into your closet and close the door.

Now, there's no way that in the days of Jesus, when he lived in this world, that there were so many distractions and invasions upon people's time in the way that it is today.

Today we just live in this world where everything is happening all the time. And even in our own lifetime, we look back and things were much calmer. They didn't seem to be so rushed.

[ 7 : 41 ] But even then, back in the day, Jesus was saying, get away on your own. Close the door. Because you need to be locked away. Away from all the interruptions. Away from all the things that are going to prevent you engaging properly with the Lord.

And as you pray in secret, and remember, this is the key. As your father, and he hears you, and you're engaged with him in prayer, he who sees in secret will reward you openly.

There will be an open answer to your prayer. And you know, I think this is part of the key. It's so important that the church takes us on board.

We should all make sure that whatever we do or don't do within the course of a day, that we set aside time to be alone with the Lord in prayer.

And I believe that if the whole church of Jesus Christ locks themselves away for a wee while every day, that the Lord will, if he's going to answer, remember he says, it's going to be an outward, an open answer.

[ 8 : 51 ] He will reward openly. There will be a display of his power. Maybe it's because God's people are not locked away every day that we're maybe not nationally seeing a display of his power.

It's quite a challenge. Anyway, maybe we're digressing slightly here, but we find that this is what the apostle is doing and he's wrestling. In fact, the word struggling comes from the word that we get our word agony from, that he was really agonizing in prayer.

And again, when you go to the Bible, you find that lots of the Lord's people wrestled and struggled and agonized in prayer. Abraham did that.

Jacob wrestled in prayer. Elijah wrestled and agonized in prayer. Jesus himself, that's the very word that is used. He was in great agony as he wrestled in prayer in the garden.

So sometimes prayer is tough. Sometimes, and the more you are engaged in prayer, the more you understand the nature of this struggling and wrestling in prayer.

[ 10 : 05 ] And we've always got to remember that there's an enemy around and about who is trying to interrupt and to spoil our prayer. So Paul is here praying and he's praying for people who he's never met.

And I think that's also interesting because sometimes people will say, you know, I can't really pray meaningfully for people that I've never met. Well, the apostle could. You know, I've heard people say, you know how we're asked to pray for the persecuted church and people say, yes, that's fine, but how do we pray for the persecuted church?

How do we pray for people that we've never, never met? Well, the apostle had absolutely no difficulty because he knew straight away and he could feel it on his spirit.

He, although he had never met these people physically, he had never met them, as he says, face to face, he had met them in prayer. He had met them spiritually.

He was bound to them spiritually. There was a spiritual bond. A spiritual bond is developed and created when you become a believer. you become part of a body.

[ 11 : 18 ] You become part of a global fellowship. You are united to the believers in Afghanistan and in North Korea just as much as to the believers in here. Even although you may never have met them, you'll meet them in glory.

But we are bound with them here, right here, right now. And that means we can pray for them. Can't pray for them by name because we don't know their names.

But the Lord puts, puts this on our heart and our spirit. We are one in Christ Jesus. And so this is how Paul, he was able to pray for them.

And he, I think it's one of the things here we see that as Paul is struggling in the prison, now again, I'm not saying that this is the case, but we've always got to think of Paul in prison.

You know, Paul spent so much of his time in prison. And it must have been incredibly frustrating to the apostle. The apostle wanted to go, if there was one thing at that moment, what Paul would have loved so much is that the prison warden would have come to the door and say, hey, Paul, guess what?

[ 12 : 30 ] I'm opening the door and you're free to go. Do you know what Paul would have done? I believe he would have said, right, I'm, I've just right, I'm writing a letter to the church in Colossae. Guess what I'm going to do?

I'm going to straight there with it and I'm going to read them this letter in the presence. That's what the apostle would have loved to do. He would have loved to have gone and met with these believers that he was praying for.

But that wasn't God's will for him. And, you know, often we find it so strange, God's will, don't we? We can't understand it. And I'm sure that there were times when the apostle, in his darker moments, where you wonder, why am I being locked up year after year?

There is so much work to do. There are these churches in their infancy and they need to be built up, they need to be established. And he was getting word that there were people coming into the churches and they were teaching false teaching and it upset him.

And he couldn't do anything about it, where he was physically, but he could spiritually. And he did what he did. First of all, he wrote and then he prayed.

[ 13 : 45 ] He prayed and he prayed and he prayed. And, you know, we cannot put any bounds upon our prayer. Little do we understand the force, the power, the impact of prayer.

Remember who it is we're praying to. The God of creation, the God who holds this world and every single individual in it in his hand, who has measured out the span of every person's life.

That's a God worth praying to. The God who does according to his will with the armies of heaven and with the inhabitants of the earth. All power belongs to him.

And sometimes we forget that when we go to the Lord and pray. He can change anything. He can do anything apart from lie and deny himself.

All power is his. So do we remember that when we go to the Lord and pray it? Well, that I believe is one of the reasons that the apostle had such a great sense of who God was.

[ 14 : 53 ] But there were times, there's no, you get little glimpses of that in Paul's writings of his frustration at being held back in prison. There was so much to do and he couldn't do it.

There were other times he was so aware that this was God's purpose and plan for him because he was actually seeing through his imprisonment that the gospel was growing.

He writes about that to the church in Philippi. He said, Hammond bonds. But the word of God is flourishing and growing. God is always working out his purposes and always working out his plans.

I often wonder how the apostle, he was human and you get little glimpses of it. There were dark moments in his experience.

Oh, he was a bright, shining, vibrant Christian. But he must have and there are little glimpses of maybe slightly darker moments. And you know, one of the things I am sure that the apostle often prayed about, or maybe into speculation here, was that he would die.

[ 16 : 04 ] Well, he knew that the end was going to be death. He knew eventually it was going to be execution. We know he had two imprisonments. And he was imprisoned and then he got out of prison.

But then there was a final imprisonment where he was executed. But I'm sure that with the light of execution in front of him, there would have been days where he would have prayed, Lord, help me not just to live well but to die well.

Help me, Lord, not to deny you. The apostle would have known only too well the history of Peter because Peter in the hour of crisis, Peter who loved the Lord Jesus, who was the forefront of everything that was happening in Jesus' time in this world.

When the crunch came, he denied him. And we know that many of the martyrs, you just even go through the time of the Kevin Anders, this was part of their prayer, that the Lord would grant them courage and faith in the face of death.

And as they approached death, that they would be given courage so that they wouldn't deny the Lord Jesus. And I'm sure that the apostle often prayed that.

[ 17 : 18 ] because so many of the different churches looked up to him. Imagine if he, in the end, denied Jesus. And I think it's something that we should all be praying about.

Maybe it's something you put away from your own mind. But it's something we should be praying about, about how we ourselves face death. How we will be in old age.

How we will be, you know, I've heard people praying, who are beginning to lose their mind, where their dementia is beginning to start.

And they've been praying that the Lord would keep them. They were aware of what was happening, so that they wouldn't be swearing, that they wouldn't be abusive, that they wouldn't, when they began to lose their mind, that they would, that the Lord would grant them the grace to continue to maintain a good witness.

we should do things like that. So that we're always seeking that, irrespective of where we are or how things are, that we're able to live and to confess by life, even if we can't by word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 18 : 32 ] Anyway, Paul is praying. And in verse, he tells us then something of what he is praying for. But again, he tells us, before we just look at that, for this, verse 29 of chapter 1, for this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

That is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is there. You know, the Holy Spirit is key to our prayer life. First of all, the Holy Spirit prompts us to pray.

You know that as well as I do, there are times all of a sudden you have to pray. You have to pray for somebody or something. It just, there's this, straight away, this prompting to pray.

Again, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us as we pray. Not in the same way as Jesus Christ intercedes, but the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in this way.

The Holy Spirit knows the mind and the will of God. And so helps us to pray in accordance with the mind and the will of God.

[ 19 : 44 ] The Holy Spirit also brings to us the Word of God so that we are praying according to the Word. So what does Paul pray for?

Well, as we look, and just very, very briefly, first of all, he's praying that the church would be a courageous church. That's what he's saying, that their hearts may be encouraged, that they might be encouraged.

And that is something that's so essential within the Christian life. And really, what is happening here is that what the apostle is really saying is, I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged.

And this word, while it means comforted and it means exhorted, it also has the idea of the word enabling, so that you will be enabled to do the right thing.

And that's a very, very important thing, because we live in a world, we could say, an enemy territory, and we live where there's so much opposition, and it's very important that we do the right thing.

[ 21 : 05 ] And that's part of what this word means, that we might be living in a way where we're doing the right thing, and where we're doing the right thing also in seeking to comfort one another, and to enable one another, and also to exhort one another.

All these words are caught up in this. Are we encouragers of one another? As I said, it's a tough world we're living in, and the worst thing that the Christian can do is to discourage any other Christian.

You make sure that you are not a discourager, but an encourager. There's plenty in this life to discourage us, every single one of us. There are plenty circumstances and events that go on within our lives that are liable to bring us down.

The one place we don't want to be knocked is in God's house with God's people. It's a poor thing when we see that. Sometimes you see when there's sheep and there's lambs around.

Sometimes you see sheep dunting lambs and butting them and pushing them away. You know, you think, oh, that's awful. But you know, sometimes that happens in the Christian church as well.

[ 22 : 25 ] That can be the attitude sometimes of Christians where they're short and they're banging and they're bumping and they're knocking people. Make sure that you don't knock people down in the Christian church because life is short.

Let us be encouragers. And that was one of the great things about Paul. And you know, Paul always took, well, he didn't always, but he had a man with him quite often on his journeys, a man called Barnabas. And I sometimes wonder if Paul took Barnabas, he took him for obviously for differing reasons, but you know, Barnabas was part of what he was, he was a great encourager.

And I wouldn't be at all surprised if that was part of the reason or one of the reasons why Paul took Barnabas along. Because he needed encouragement as well. And we all need encouragement.

And there's something about people who encourage us. It makes us, we all want to be inspired and lifted up and helped on in our way. It doesn't take much to encourage somebody.

Make sure that's what you do. Well, that's one of the things Paul was, he was an encourager and he was praying that the church would be encouraged because he knew it was difficult being a Christian.

[ 23 : 43 ] And so he also prayed that they would be knit together in love. Well, when you knit something, you join something seamlessly. When you're knitting, and it's knitting well, and when you've finished the knitting, you can't really tell where and what is joined.

It's all seamlessly woven together. And that's what he's praying that the church will be like, that they'll be knit together in love. Without love, there is no real church.

If you have a church without love, it's not a real church. And the reason I say that, that's maybe a very bold statement, but it is true. Because God is love, Christ is love, Christ is the head of the church.

And a church without love cannot have Christ as the head of it. Because the love of God is shed abroad within the heart of his people. It's one of the very, it's one of the, the mark.

Remember what Jesus said to the disciples? Love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples.

[ 24 : 56 ] Isn't that an amazing thought? What is the greatest hallmark, the greatest visible mark that can be upon you? It is that you love, that you are a passion of love, that you love one another.

This is how people will see that you love me. That's what Jesus is saying. So that's a real challenge. That's why I'm saying that, that if you have a church without love and people without love, it doesn't matter what profession they make, it doesn't matter how much they say, oh we follow the Lord.

If they are void of love, if they haven't love, then as Paul would say, they have nothing. Go to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Love believes all things.

Love hopes all things. You just look at 1 Corinthians chapter 13, that great chapter on love. And the apostle says, remember what he said, love is patient, it's kind, doesn't envy, doesn't boast, isn't arrogant, isn't rude.

Love doesn't insist on its own way. Love isn't irritable or resentful. Love doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing. Love rejoices with the truth.

[ 26 : 20 ] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends, never fails. What a different world we would be in if that's how everybody lived.

What a different world we would be in if that's how the church behaved all the time. When I talk about the church, I'm talking about the church in general, the church in its broadest terms.

Knit together in love. And then he says also that you'd be knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery which is in Christ and so on.

In other words, that they will be enriched and they will be enlightened. That's really what he's saying. And Paul uses different words here.

Now there's two or three sermons in that in itself but just to look at this very very briefly. He uses the word understanding and that word actually means critical knowledge.

[ 27 : 28 ] It means very simply that you will be able to assess a situation right away and know what is right and what is wrong.

Isn't that a wonderful thing? That's the understanding that God gives. Where you are able to assess a situation right away and know what is right and what is wrong.

You know, that is why we are told as Christians to pray for wisdom. It's one of the great themes that runs through the Bible is the importance of wisdom in our lives.

It is something that we as a church should be praying for all our leaders in all places of authority that they be given heavenly wisdom. It is that ability to be able to assess a situation and to know what is right and what is wrong.

What a difference our world would be, what a difference our countries would be if all our leaders were constantly going to the Lord and saying, Lord, right, here's the situation, grant me this understanding, grant me this heavenly wisdom, grant me this ability to know what is right and what is wrong and to make the proper decisions in this way.

[ 28 : 41 ] That is why it is so important. That's why Paul says to us, as a church, we have a duty to pray for kings and for the rulers, for those in authority over us.

It's our duty, are we? Let's go back to the secret room, to our own wee prayer place, close the door. Do we daily pray for those in authority over us?

Or daily are we saying, oh, I messed up, they're making a game, look at this, look at that. Are we praying for them? Because remember what the Lord elsewhere says, if my people who are called by my name, if they humble themselves, if they pray, God puts the onus on the healing of the land upon his people.

not upon the rulers, not upon the governments, not upon those in authority, but upon his people. And that brings us back to God rewarding openly, are his people praying?

It's a challenge. So that's what Paul is praying, that they would have this understanding. And again, he talks here about not only this understanding, but also knowledge, the wisdom and knowledge.

[ 30 : 01 ] And again, this is kind of this instinctive knowledge of being able to know right away if something is right or something is wrong, and also the wisdom to be able to communicate what you know.

You know, it's one thing knowing something. it's another thing being able to share it. And you see what the apostle is praying for here. He's wanting the church to grow.

He's wanting the church to expand. He's wanting the church to evangelize. So he says, right, I'm praying here that you will know instinctively what is right and what is wrong.

That you will have come to a greater knowledge of the truth, and you'll have the ability to take that truth and to share that truth with others. Because when you see all that is written in there, all the riches of the full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, and as I say, there are sermons in there.

We're seeing here very simply what the apostle is praying for this church. Is Jesus today your Jesus?

[ 31 : 16 ] Do you know personally this Jesus as your very own? Do you have a knowledge of him? Do you have a personal knowledge of him?

See, there's a big difference between knowing about someone and actually knowing that person. There are loads of people in this world we know plenty about.

We know about them, but we've never met them. See, there's a big, big difference. And it's the same about Jesus. Every one of you in here knows about Jesus.

But do you know him? Well, ask the Lord today, just as the apostle has been praying here, that you would be given this understanding, that you would be given this knowledge, that you would be given a knowledge that isn't just in your mind, but a knowledge that you experience within your own passion, within your own heart, of knowing who Jesus is and being able to believe him and accept him and trust him and depend on him and receive him as your very own Lord and Savior.

Let us pray. Lord our God, we pray today that you will bless us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. help us to remember that all resources are yours.

[ 32 : 42 ] And so often we live as if that wasn't the case. So often we can feel defeated when we aren't maybe battling at the throne of grace in the way we should.

Help us to remember, Lord, that you want to bless your people. You want to enrich your people. And may we, we're told again often in the word, you have not because you have not asked.

We pray then, Lord, that we may be constantly at the door of your throne, that we might be constantly seeking that you will open the windows of heaven and pour down a blessing so that there will not be even room enough to receive it.

Watch over us, bless a cup of tea in the hall after and do us good and take away sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I'm going to conclude singing in Psalm 133.

Psalm 133. This is from the Scottish Psalter. Page 424.

[ 33 : 54 ] Junus Eastgate. Behold how good a thing it is, and how, becoming well, together such as brethren are in unity to dwell.

Like precious ointment on the head that down the beard did flow, even Aaron's beard unto the skirts did of his garments go. As Hermon's Jew, the Jew that doth on Zion hills descend, for there the blessing God commands, life that shall never end.



133, the whole Psalm, the Tuniscap, Behold how good a thing it is. Behold how good a thing it is, and how becoming well, together such as brethren are in unity to dwell.

In unity to dwell. In unity to dwell. Like precious ointment of the head, blood and the bearded flow, he builds him to the stirs, the dead of his garments go.

The dead of his garments go. As men, once do the do that die, on Zion guilty send, forever end.

[ 35 : 49 ] For there the blessing God commands, life that shall never end, life that shall never end. now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore.

Amen.