



COLOSSIANS
RESCUED
COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

MAIN IDEA

The gospel is transforming power that rescues us from bondage and transfers us into the freedom of God's kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

- **Have you ever made a spiritual goal? How do spiritual goals come to fruition differently than physical or relational goals?**
- **Who have you seen grow in faith over time? What specific areas of spiritual growth have you noticed in that person?**
- **What about you? How have you grown in faith over time? Name one way you'd like to see future growth.**

Many people come to Christ wanting His help in death but never truly invite Him to impact earthly life in a meaningful way. But life in Christ is a life of transformation. We'll see this through Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-14.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read Colossians 1:9.

- **What would compel Paul to engage in ongoing prayer over time for believers in another city?**

What does Paul's first sentence in verse 9 of this letter to the Colossians teach us about his understanding of who God is? Of the struggles he believed the Colossian Christians might face?

Paul told the Colossian Christians that he and Timothy constantly prayed for them. They didn't wait for a date on the calendar to relate to God and other people with specific intention. As soon as Paul heard from his friend Epaphras about the loving community of faith in Colossae, he began praying for them. Paul understood that prayer is the means by which people know true wisdom and understanding—the kind which only found in relation to the truth about Jesus Christ.

- **Why do we need others to intercede to God on our behalf?**
 - **What did Paul ask God to do for the Colossian believers?**
 - **Is it possible for anyone to truly be “filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”? Why or why not?**
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Paul's commitment to ongoing prayer for these believers demonstrated his confidence in praying—he prayed with confident expectation based on what God's Word teaches rather than wishful thinking based on his own desires or emotions.

Paul wrote this to Timothy about the Word of God: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). And God's Word was accomplishing that in Paul's life—he knew who God is, what God has done, and what God promises to do. Paul could pray in this posture as he remained in God's presence, longing for His power and depending on His promises. And so can we.

- **How might we mistakenly view prayer as wishful thinking?**
- **How does praying in accordance with God's Word move us from wishful thinking to confident expectation in prayer?**

> Have someone in your group read Colossians 1:10-12.

- **In these verses, what stands out to you that Paul asked God to do in the lives of these Colossian believers?**
- **What does it mean to "walk worthy of the Lord" (v. 10)?**

Paul prayed that the Colossian believers would "walk worthy of the Lord" by pleasing Him, bearing fruit, and growing in their knowledge of Him (v. 10); that they would be strengthened through the Lord's power (v. 11); and that they would give thanks to God for all He has done (v. 12).

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- **According to Paul's words, what is our role in our own spiritual growth? What isn't our role?**

Paul wasn't instructing the Colossians here, he was praying for them. God draws people to Himself in Christ and His Spirit produces fruit in us as we abide in Him (John 15:5).

So Paul didn't just want the Colossian believers to have head knowledge. He prayed that this God-given, Jesus-centered, Spirit-directed knowledge would help them—and by effect, their church—walk in that truth. He wanted the believers in Colossae to be shaped into the image of Christ and follow God's will. But this wasn't simply a desire of Paul's heart, it is the desire of God's heart too.

- **How can we characterize the needs Paul viewed as most crucial for prayer—physical or spiritual? Why was that his focus?**
- **Which types of needs do we typically focus on in times of prayer together—physical or spiritual? Why?**

When our focus is only on the temporary things of earth, our understanding and practice of prayer will reflect that focus. It's not that our earthly needs don't matter—they do! Yet God continuously calls us to a deeper understanding of the gifts He wants to give His children.

- **Which of these outcomes that Paul asked God to produce in believers' lives have you found challenging: bearing spiritual fruit, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power, having great endurance, having great patience, or joyfully giving thanks? Do you have confidence that God can accomplish that in you? Why or why not?**

Paul's prayer displayed a godly desire for the Colossian believers. More than any physical or circumstantial thing, he wanted the believers in Colossae to be shaped into the image of Christ and to follow God's will. We also have some agency in our rescue—we make the decision every day whether to turn to Christ in prayer. If we do, He will produce fruit in us. If we don't turn to Him in prayer, we are depending on the false god of self.

> Have someone in your group read Colossians 1:13-14.

- **What realities did Paul name in the past tense? What does this indicate about the confidence we should have in those realities?**

Every person who turns in faith to Jesus Christ has been rescued from the domain of darkness and is transferred into Christ's eternal kingdom. Paul expressed this another way in his letter to the Ephesians.

- **Read Ephesians 2:1-3. Why do all people need rescue?**
 - **Read Ephesians 2:4-5. How are any of us rescued from the horrific reality Ephesians 2:1-3 describes?**
 - **Now consider Ephesians 2:1-5 in light of Colossians 1. Why was it appropriate for Paul to choose the word "rescued" (v. 13) to describe the way Jesus redeemed His followers?**
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Paul wrote to the Ephesians that all people are dead in our sin—not pretty bad off, not simply headed in a wrong direction, not capable of picking ourselves back up to life again. We’re dead, existing in a hopeless condition. And while we were in that state, fully deserving of God’s holy wrath, Christ died for us to offer all who trust in Him the great grace of salvation. In the death our sinfulness required, He raised us to new life again. In Christ, we have forgiveness of sins.

Through Christ, God had rescued the Colossian believers from paganism and brought them into His beloved Son’s kingdom. Through Christ, God had freed them from slavery to sin by forgiving their sins. Paul understood Jesus is the center of everything, and he wanted the church in Colossae to understand that too. We have the opportunity to understand that as well. God preserved Paul’s words to the Colossian believers as truth for His church today and throughout every generation to come.

- **Has Jesus rescued you? How so?**
- **In verse 14, what did Paul identify as ongoing realities? What confidence do those realities give you in prayer? In the circumstances of your life?**

APPLICATION

Our prayers not only reveal what we desire from God, but also what we believe about Him. We may claim to believe certain things about God, but when we are on our knees, our true theology shines through. As we acknowledge the importance of God's eternal rescue of us in Christ Jesus, it's also important to understand that God knows we need daily rescue. He knows you need Him—for your own spiritual growth and for the spiritual growth of other believers. He doesn't judge the way you engage with Him in that conversation. He's your Father and He loves you, so you can be confident that He wants what is best for you and everyone else, and He is faithful to hear you as you come to Him.

- **How does Paul's prayer for the Colossians challenge you?**
- **What does Paul's prayer teach you concerning the power of the gospel at work in your life?**
- **What should be your ongoing prayer for yourself? For others? How confident should you be that He will answer those prayers? Why?**

PRAY

Thank God for rescuing us and for revealing that rescue in His Word and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Ask Him to help you see your desperate need to regularly communicate with Him in prayer. Ask God to help you develop a lifestyle of intentional and fervent prayer, confident, fruitful, and forgiving, so that you would always be ready to hear from Him.

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.

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

1:9. Epaphras had told Paul about the Colossian believers' love in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit working in and among them was producing God's kind of love (agape). From the time of Epaphras's report concerning the Colossian believers' positive qualities, Paul consistently interceded on their behalf. Paul asked God to fill the believers with the knowledge of His will. "Knowledge" renders the Greek term for "full knowledge" that comes from a personal relationship with God. Paul stressed that God revealed His will in Christ. The Colossian Christians had partial knowledge of that will; they needed complete knowledge. "Wisdom" is the grasp of general principles; "understanding" (insight) is the application of those principles to specific situations—making wise decisions. The term "spiritual" stresses that genuine wisdom and understanding come through the Holy Spirit.

Notes:

1:10. The purpose of wisdom from God is that believers may walk worthy of the Lord—that is, may live in such a manner that their lifestyles honor Christ and reflect His character. In attitude, word, and deed, believers were to follow Christ's will for them. With four words conveying continuous action, Paul described what Christlike living involves. First, it is continuously bearing fruit in every good work. Here, fruit refers to gracious deeds of kindness and generosity prompted by God's working in believers' lives. Second, believers are to be growing in the knowledge (full knowledge) of God. They are to experience a deepening personal intimacy with God in which they understand and implement more of His character.

1:11-12. Third, Paul prayed that the Colossian Christians would be strengthened (empowered) by all power. The Greek term rendered "power" has the sense of God's inherent, unlimited strength or ability available to believers. The phrase "glorious might" has the sense of God's sovereign strength. Such God-given strength would enable believers to have endurance

and patience—to persevere in the face of difficulties without grumbling or retaliating. Fourth, Paul prayed that the Colossian believers would go on giving thanks to God. The word “Father” may emphasize God as Christ’s Father or as believers’ Heavenly Father.

Notes:

1:13-14. God deserved gratitude because He had rescued the believers from the dominion of darkness. In Christ, God had freed believers from enslavement to sin. In doing so, He transferred them into the kingdom of His Son. By identifying the kingdom as Christ’s, Paul stressed the Lord’s absolute sovereignty. Another reason for consistently expressing thanks to God was His providing redemption in Christ. Christ’s voluntary self-giving on the cross provided release from sin’s slavery to all who would place their faith in Him. His vicarious atonement made possible redemption, which Paul explained as the forgiveness of sins.