

## Prayer

Give us the Spirit of Praise, Father Almighty! May we thank You for our lives and the world in which we live; may we praise You for the saving work of Jesus Christ; may we thank You for each other and the love we find in fellowship, and may we praise You for Your eternal glory and power, revealed to us through Your Word. May the Spirit of Praise never leave us! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Travel

*Pray today for those who have to travel for work, in sales or research, for example. Pray for anyone you know whose personal life is compromised by the need to travel.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for small businesses trying to keep going during recession*
- *Give thanks for the many opportunities we have to share our faith*
- *Pray for those who look after relatives with Alzheimer's disease*

## Meditation

There is a deep silence in the soul of one who knows tragedy  
Of whom we say the heart has been broken, but more than this;  
The very spirit of life has been dismantled, shattered ...  
The 'God-breathed' heart of life, abused and torn apart.

You have been there, and so have I, and most of us alive;  
But we can never fully know the pain and anguish of another.  
We are all so very different, born within the heart of God,  
So only He can breathe again the breath that brings new life.

There is no counsel good enough to mend the human soul;  
Except the comfort of Christ's prophetic words; 'come to Me' . . .  
Receive this, broken one, and walk the path of life again!  
Hear these words of love; and break the enemy's affliction!

Spirit into spirit flows as the soul breathes life from God again  
Remaking all things new to stand again within this hurting world.  
May Christ's followers so travel the troubled paths of life,  
That the Creator's healing balm of love is shared by all, with all.

## Bible Study - Colossians 1:1-8

<sup>1</sup> *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Timothy;*

<sup>2</sup> *To the saints and faithful friends in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.*

<sup>3</sup> *In our prayers for you, we always give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love you have for all the saints <sup>5</sup> arising from the hope stored up for you in heaven, which you have already heard about through the preaching of the truth of the Gospel. <sup>6</sup> For just as this is bearing fruit in the whole world, it has come to you*

and has been growing amongst you since the day you heard it and understood the truth about the grace of God.<sup>7</sup> You learnt this from Epaphras our much loved fellow-worker who is faithful to us in the service of Christ.<sup>8</sup> It is he who has told us of your love in the Spirit.

## Review

The beginning of this great letter of Paul is wonderful for us to read today because it speaks so warmly of the things of faith which are dear to us. These verses speak of God's saints, meaning all who believe the Gospel (1:2), and we immediately feel included. Words such as 'peace' and 'grace' (1:2) in Paul's greeting are music to our ears, for if Paul blessed the Colossians with these valuable spiritual qualities, then they bless us today as well. Then, as the letter describes Paul's prayers for the Colossian church, other great classical Christian words spill out; 'thanks' (1:3), 'faith' and 'love' (1:4), 'heaven' and the 'truth of the Gospel' (1:5); 'fruit' and the 'grace of God' (1:6), 'faithful ... service' (1:7) and 'love in the Spirit' (1:8). Surely any Christian reader will want to launch straight in and revel in exploring how these great Gospel themes intertwine, just as they do at the beginning of many of Paul's letters (see Phil 1:3-11; Eph 1:3-14, 1 Thess. 1:2-6 etc.).

**The church at Colossae and its founding** This introduction also helps us understand the way the Gospel was preached in some of the first waves of evangelism in the world. It appears that whilst Paul was at Ephesus on what is called his third missionary journey (reported largely in Acts 19,20), someone called Epaphras (1:7) was converted and preached the Gospel himself when he returned to his home in the small town of Colossae. Paul therefore wrote to this church, which he had never visited, in order to support Epaphras' teaching of the Gospel (1:7, 4:12). I will not go into the details of how this is worked out through connecting names and place names in Acts and Paul's letters, but this is the consensus about the origins of the Colossian church, and the whole story is an inspiring example of mission and evangelism in the early church.

**Exposing false teaching and explaining the truth** This explains why Paul talked about praying for what he had 'heard' (1:4) about the Colossian church, and connected it with the exciting growth of the church in the early years after the death of Jesus (1:6). He stressed his personal connection with Epaphras (1:7, 4:12) who had travelled to see Paul and give him news of the young church. As we read on in Colossians we will discover more about the reasons for all this, because Epaphras clearly told Paul about false teaching that had come into the church and expressed his concern. The letter was therefore sent by Paul to expose this false teaching (e.g. see 2:8f.) and establish the truth of the Gospel. Paul regarded it as essential that all the young churches kept closely to the Gospel they had received, for in those days so many people believed in such a variety of gods and philosophies that it was easy for a church to be infiltrated by devious untruths. As we read this letter we will learn about some of these heresies, and although they will appear extraordinary to us, they may have seemed very reasonable to the people of Paul's day. If they had taken root within the church, irreparable damage could have been done to the Gospel.

**A letter of Paul and its inclusion in Scripture** The Lord, however, was in control, and Paul was not simply a remarkable evangelist and a worker of miracles; an impression we may easily obtain from the stories about him in Acts (chs. 13-28). His letters were written to stabilise the sharing of the Gospel so that the young Christian Church had a clear standard, a reference point for the truth of the Gospel. The letter to the Colossians was written from prison (4:10,18) and at first it was sent there to speak to the people to whom it was addressed. However, as time went by, it was realised that what it said was of great importance, beyond its value to the people of Colossae. This is the reason why it was

eventually included in that package of letters by Paul that are included in the New Testament Scriptures. They still speak to us of the 'standard' of Christian faith which remains true for us even today, two thousand years later.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Would you find it easy to say to a fellow Christian 'grace and peace to you'? What greeting could you give which conveyed your faith?
2. Discuss the impressions you have gained about the Colossian church from the opening verses of the book.
3. How can we strengthen the ties between the true churches of God in our midst today?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*The beginning of the church at Colossae has always fascinated me. I have wondered what it was that so impressed Epaphras that he preached so readily; yes, I am sure he was saved, but such immediate results are often the result of particular things happening that only make sense in context, and I would love to know the details! Nevertheless, Scripture often only gives us the bare bones of a matter so that we do not fall into the sin of worshipping the issue or the event rather than the God who worked through them. We praise God that the Colossian church was founded and that we have this letter, because this is our heritage, in a very real sense.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- Think of some issue in your church about which you have a disagreement with someone, or something you feel needs representation to be made to the governing church 'council' (or elder's meeting, for example). Try writing a letter which explains the situation, but does so by applying Scriptural principles and / or Bible texts.
- Pray for those who find it hard to express their faith in 'standard' terms, and always seek to go beyond the boundaries they perceive. Pray that God will hold them within His church and help them perceive truth.

## Final Prayer

Holy Lord, great God of wonders and great Lord of all glory; do those amazing feats and signs in our midst that will encourage us to be bold and strong in our faith; prepared to take risks and join the heavenly battle against all evil. Praise You, Holy Lord for Your great power and Majesty! AMEN