

Let's Pray for the Church  
Ephesians 1, 3; Philippians 1, Colossians 1, 4

This message is for everyone who is a regular attender in this church. I have handed out to you a page of New Testament prayers. Here's what I will ask of you at the end. I will ask that some time when you are alone, you will picture in your mind this whole body. You will picture the KCC church body when all the regulars are present here in this room. And you will lift this group up before God, and you will pray one of these prayers for all of us. You will say, "Please, God, do this for our whole group," and then pray one of these.

These prayers widen our understanding of prayer. We tend mostly to pray for individuals in trouble. We ask God to help them, to bring them relief, to comfort them. These are good prayers. In the Psalms, many prayers ask for that.

These prayers on this page are different in two ways. First, these prayers are all for a whole church. Second, they are not about troubles, nothing to do with troubles, they are prayers that the best parts of our faith would grow stronger. Prayers for the whole church that the best parts of our faith will grow stronger.

Prayers 2 to 5 on your sheet are prison prayers. Paul wrote Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians from prison. All he can do for the churches is pray for them. We have these prayers so we will know what to pray when all we can do is pray.

These are *prayers*. The apostle Paul prays to God that God will do this. God made sure these prayers were in the Bible. That means these are things God wants to do for churches, God wants to hear prayers like this for churches. When he hears them, he wants to answer them, to do just what we asked for. In sense, God binds himself to do these things, by giving these prayers to us.

God gave these prayers so we will know what he wants to do. Paul could have prayed these things without telling the churches. But churches need to know what it is that God wants to do. Paul wanted to educate those churches about God's priorities.

Your sheet has a paragraph about Epaphras at the top, and then six prayers. We'll take a brief look at all seven paragraphs.

The Example of Epaphras – Colossians 4:12–13; Phm 17

*"Epaphras [my fellow prisoner], who is one of you Colossians and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and confident. I personally testify that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis."*

Paul did not start the church at Colossae, in fact he'd never been there. Epaphras first preached the gospel in Colossae, and he planted that church. Epaphras and Paul ended up in the same prison, and they got acquainted there. It could be that his conversations with Epaphras convinced Paul that he needed to write this letter to the church at Colossae.

"He is always wrestling in prayer for you," "I personally testify that he is working hard for you." What's actually happening? Epaphras prays out loud for these churches, and he is always at it. Paul can hear him. "Epaphras is always wrestling in prayer for you, he is working hard for you." Prayer for others is hard work. Don't let anyone tell you that prayer is just sweet communion with Jesus. The Lord's own prayers weren't like that. It's hard work, and good work.

And what does he pray? "That you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and confident." Paul's been listening, and that's the core of Epaphras's prayer for that church. What if we prayed this for our church, that we together would stand firm in all the will of God, mature and confident. If you could only pray one line from this page, you could not do much better. "God, may we all stand firm in your will, mature and confident."

### The Lord's Prayer

*(1) Our Father in heaven, may we honour your holy name, may your kingdom come soon, may we do your will as it is done in heaven. Give us each day what we need. Forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Don't lead any of us into testing or temptation. Rescue each one from evil and the evil one. You are the King, yours is the power and the glory. (Matthew 6:9–13)*

I have been praying these prayers for a while, and have paraphrased them as suits me. I hope you will forgive me that.

This is how the Lord taught us to pray, and for me it is the most radical prayer in the Bible. "*Our Father in heaven, may we honour your holy name, may your kingdom come soon, may we do your will as it is done in heaven.*" Since when do our prayers begin with God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will? The Lord Jesus wants us to pray this way for our church: "*Father, may we honour your name, may your kingdom come soon, may we do your will.*"

Remember the prayer of Epaphras? That we would stand firm in all the will of God, mature and confident. I'm not going to say more about the Lord's Prayer. We've talked about it before. Once we've prayed the first three phrases, the rest flows naturally. People, let's pray these things for our church. Father, your name, your kingdom, your will.

### The Knowing Prayer – Ephesians 1

*(2) Father, you brought us to faith in the Lord Jesus and you gave us love for all your children. Thank you for this, thank you. Glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us all the Spirit, who will make us wise and reveal you to us, so that we can know you. Father, open the eyes of*

*our hearts to see your light, so that we can know the hope to which you have called us. And so that we can understand the glorious riches of your own great inheritance, which is all of us, your holy people. And so that we can know how great is your power that works in us who believe. It is the same mighty strength that raised Christ from the dead and seated him beside you, above all rulers and powers in heaven and on earth. (Ephesians 1:15–19)*

First, let's thank God for our faith in the Lord Jesus and our love for all believers. These are things that God has done for us, he has called us to this and he makes it happen. Faith is not just believing and having our sins forgiven. Faith is ongoing trust in the Lord of heaven and earth, that he has put each of us in exactly the situation in which we find ourselves, and we trust him in our particular situation because we know he's leading and helping us in it.

After that, we pray for our church that we would all know four things. (i) *Glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us all the Spirit, who will make us wise and reveal you to us, so that we can know you.* That we would know the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. How do we get to know our Father in heaven? He reveals himself to us with the Spirit, and he does it when we pray this. We pray for our church that God will reveal himself to us, so that we would know him.

(ii) *Father, open the eyes of our hearts to see your light, so that we can know the hope to which you have called us.* God our Father will open the eyes of our hearts to see his light, so we can know our hope, we can see the incredible end to all this. Just before this in Ephesians 1, Paul wrote about our inheritance. We Jews, says Paul, were the first to hope in Christ, and then the gospel went to you Gentiles as well, who will receive the same inheritance. God wants us to have a better sense of our destination. Father, open the eyes of our hearts to know our hope.

(iii) *And so that we can understand the glorious riches of your own great inheritance, which is all of us, your holy people.* This one is a mind-bender. We are going to receive an inheritance from God. We just covered that, it's our hope. Did you know that God also has an inheritance coming? He's arranged an inheritance for himself, and do you know what it is? It's us, all of us. God's people are his inheritance.

This request still builds on the line, "open the eyes of our hearts." *Open the eyes of our hearts so that we can understand the glorious riches of your own great inheritance, which is all of us, your holy people.* We pray that the church would understand the glorious riches of God's inheritance, his people, the incredible wealth of this inheritance. God wants us to grasp this.

(iv) This fourth request also builds on "open the eyes of our hearts." *"Open the eyes of our hearts so that we can know how great is your power that works in us who believe. It is the same mighty strength that raised Christ from the dead and seated him beside you, above all rulers and powers in heaven and on earth."*

We experience so much weakness that we can hardly believe that power like this is active right now in our lives. This is also a mind-bender.

But Hebrews says that Jesus was made in every way as we are, and tempted in every way as we are, and that he was clothed in weakness. God's power got a lot done through Christ's weakness. Here's the thing: there is no contradiction at all between our experience of weakness and the overwhelming power of God at work in our lives at the very same time, same day and hour.

Pray that we as a church would know four things: we would know God, we would know what we hope for, our heritage, we would know what a great inheritance God has, which is all of us, and we would know how much power of God is at work in us who believe. How much would our daily lives change if God gave all of us together a deep awareness of these four things? Just going through the prayer makes a difference, and we haven't even prayed yet. These are what God does for a church when people pray for a church like that. God wants to hear this prayer.

That was the knowing prayer. The next one is ...

### The Christ's Love Prayer – Ephesians 3

*(3) Father, from your wealth of glory, and by your powerful Spirit, strengthen our inner selves. May Christ dwell in our hearts to shape us. Plant us and root us in your love. Give us, together with all your holy people, strength to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is Christ's love. May we know his unknowable love, so that we can all be filled to the brim with you, Father.* (Ephesians 3:16–19)

I'm going to go through the rest of the prayers more briefly, just the emphasis. This is also a prayer about knowing, and it mostly one thing we should know: Christ's love for us. Three lines say much the same thing in different ways. First, *plant us and root us in your love*. More literally, may we be rooted and established in love. Pray that our church would have a completely solid rooting and foundation in God's love. May we be solidly planted and firmly rooted in your love.

Second, *give us, together with all your holy people, strength to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is Christ's love*. God needs to give us strength to grasp how much of Christ's love there actually is. Third, *may we know his unknowable love, so that we can all be filled to the brim with you, Father*. Paul prays that the Ephesian church would know Christ's love, and in the same breath he says it's impossible, there is too much love there to grasp.

And the result of being rooted in Christ's love and knowing it is that we would be filled to the brim with God. The way to be filled up with God is to be more aware of Christ's love for us, and that comes when God does it, and he does that when people pray for it. We could pray that.

## The Love One Another Prayer – Philippians 1

*God and Father of Christ, make our love for each other increase more and more, together with knowledge and insight, so that we will choose what is best. Then we will be sincere and steadfast on the Day of Christ. Our lives will be filled with the fruit that only Christ Jesus can produce, and this will bring you glory and praise. (Philippians 1:9–11)*

The first two phrases are the most important one here. “*Make our love for each other increase more and more, together with knowledge and insight.*” These two phrases are the only request in the prayer. The rest is the result of God answering this.

In this prayer, more love is something God will do for us if we ask. “Together with knowledge and insight.” Sincere love can make mistakes. It's as simple as parents spoiling their children. Lots of genuine love, but not enough knowledge and insight. I've done this often enough.

I said or did something that I thought would help, I wanted to help, but it was not good. We don't always know the best way to love the people that we really do love. “May our love for each other increase more and more, together with knowledge and insight.”

Everything else in this prayer is the result of God responding to those two phrases. First, will be able to choose what's best. To choose what's best, God must give increasing love for one another, and along with this, God needs to supply knowledge and insight. Then, we are able to choose what's best.

And when we can choose what best, then this will happen: “*We will be sincere and steadfast on the Day of Christ. Our lives will be filled with the fruit that only Christ Jesus can produce, which brings glory and praise to God.*” Let's pray for our church, that our love will increase more and more in knowledge and insight.

## The Worthy Pleasing Life – Colossians 1

*Father, fill us all with knowing your will, this wisdom from the Spirit, so that we will live worthy of the Lord and always please him. Produce in us all kinds of good works, and help us grow in our knowledge of you. Strengthen us with all the power that comes from your glorious might, so that we will endure everything with patience. We give you joyful thanks, Father: you gave us a share in your kingdom of light. You rescued us from the authority of darkness, and you brought us safely into the kingdom of the Son you love. (Colossians 1:9–13)*

*Father, fill us all with knowing your will, this wisdom from the Spirit, so that we will live worthy of the Lord and always please him.* Here is the core of the will of God for every one of us, and the core of wisdom from the Spirit: that we will live worthy of the Lord and always please him.

Some lives would be an embarrassment to Jesus. We don't want to live like that. When we put our trust in Jesus, we joined ourselves to someone who lived very well. And he joined himself to us. Let's live daily lives that please the Lord Jesus. It's something we can pray for our church. God will work to see this done among us.

And what kind of life pleases the Lord? The rest of the prayer fills this out with four words: fruitful, growing, strong, and thankful. *Fruitful*: produce in us all kinds of good works. God, help us all bear fruit in all kinds of good works. No one person does all the kinds of good works, but we all do a few, and together the church bears fruit in all kinds of good works.

*Growing*: in our knowledge of God. We're like a plant that bears fruit and grows. What exactly grows? Knowledge of God. This is like the first line of the first Ephesians prayer: *give us all the Spirit, who will make us wise and reveal you to us, so that we can know you*. I get the feeling that our spiritual chequing account is full, but we live on handouts, because we don't know our God.

Fruitful, growing, then *Strong*: *Strengthen us with all the power that comes from your glorious might, so that we will endure everything with patience*. People, we don't pray this. When we think of the power that comes from God's glorious might, we're thinking deliverance, and we're asking for deliverance. I don't know that the church at Colossae was any better, but I know that we don't usually pray like this.

There truly is a lot of endurance and patience in our church. No doubt about that. This is what I think is happening. We're praying for deliverance, and God is giving us endurance and patience. He's not doing what we ask, but he never does nothing. He's answering *this* prayer even though we're not praying it. People, God wants us to pray this for our church: "strengthen us with all the power that comes from your glorious might, so that we will endure everything with patience." When you're alone, pray this for us all.

*Thankful*. What kind of life pleases the Lord? Fruitful in good works, growing in our understanding of God, strengthened for all endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks for our salvation: "*We give you joyful thanks, Father: you gave us a share in your kingdom of light. You rescued us from the authority of darkness, and you brought us safely into the kingdom of the Son you love.*" We don't just ask God to make us thankful, we ask God make us joyfully thankful *for this*. We joyfully thank God for the Real Deliverance.

These prayers make me feel like our minds are too small. Our salvation is a wonderful wide bright river, God's river of life, taking us right into his presence. We are all in little boats on this river. The water is clear and beautiful, and the scenery on the shore is out of this world.

But in the boat there are troubles. There's turmoil and distress in the boat. There are also good things in the boat, warm and comforting things in the boat. The trouble is, we're too preoccupied with what's in the boat. We don't see the river, or the shore, or the New Jerusalem that's up ahead. Just that little boat.

These prayers open the eyes of our hearts. Pray these prayers for our whole church. These are all prayers for a particular church, so let's use them for our church. God wants to do these things, and he will. God makes things like this happen. Prayer is work, but we can do it. Why should just others do this? You could pray one of these once a week for this church.

### Ed's Prayer

*Father, may KCC stand firm in all your will, mature and confident. Equip us all with everything good for doing your will, and work in us what pleases you. Work in us so that we will want to do what pleases you, and so that we will do it. Lead us in the right path for your name's sake.*  
(Colossians 4; Hebrews 13; Philippians 2; Psalm 23)

This is how I've been praying for our congregation for all the years I've been here. The opening line from Epaphras is new. I like that line. The rest of this I've prayed hundreds and hundreds of times for this church body.

About 15 years ago, our church gave some money to Providence, and the fund raiser in those days would take a pastor out for lunch, if the church gave money to Providence. So the fund raiser took me out for lunch. He said to me, "So, Ed, what's happening in your church? Have you got plans? Have you a five year plan for your church?"

I said, "This week I prayed that God would work in our church so that we would want to do what pleased him, and so that we would do it. My five year plan is to pray that every week for five years." He laughed in my face. I said, "Would you like to hear my ten year plan?" He did not want to know my ten year plan, and he didn't laugh. We talked about safer things after that.

You should know that the elders do make plans for the future. You should also know that none of the things we plan are nearly as important as God answering that prayer about us doing what pleased him. Pray for our church, my brothers and sisters. These prayers lead us deeper in to our real deliverance. Amen.

PRAYER: Father, praying is one of the things we need help with. You put it on Epaphras's heart to work hard in prayer for the people he knew and loved. Would you give us some of that? We want to be people that pray your kind of prayers for each other. Lead us into this. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what pleases him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.