



PRAYER: OUR FOUNDATION & OUR FUTURE

Week 1 | *Pray for People, Not Circumstances* | Teacher: Dr. Amy Cedrone
Sermon Questions for 7.6.2025

OPENER

As America celebrated its 250th birthday this weekend, Bent Tree stepped into a question that runs even deeper: not just who we have been as a church, but who God is calling us to become. Pastor Libin chose a series on prayer for this July because prayer is the posture that shapes what comes next. As Bent Tree approaches its 50th anniversary, we are not just looking back. We are leaning forward.

This month we are traveling through the prayers of the New Testament, asking that the language of Scripture would become the language of this church. We begin with Paul's letter to the Colossians, written to a small, overlooked church in a declining city surrounded by pressures to water down their faith. Their circumstances were shrinking. Their gospel was not.

Dr. Amy Cedrone opened with a central conviction from this passage: Paul is not praying for transformed circumstances. He is praying for transformed people. That distinction is the heartbeat of this sermon, and it invites us to ask what we are actually praying for when we pray for ourselves and for our church.

READ

Colossians 1:1-14 (CSB)

MAIN POINTS

1. Paul Establishes Identity Before Addressing the Threat (vv. 1-2)

Before Paul says anything about the false teaching swirling around the Colossian church, he roots his readers in who they already are. He calls them saints, which means set apart for God's purposes, not by anything they have achieved, but by what Christ has done. He calls them faithful and brothers and sisters, calling out the identity he wants them to live into before the pressure mounts.

Paul also uses a phrase that appears more than 160 times in his letters: "in Christ." It is not mystical language. It is positional. These believers lived in Colossae, but they belonged in Christ. Their address did not define them. Their citizenship in the kingdom of God did. The greeting "grace and peace" carries the same weight: grace was the Gentile greeting, shalom was the Jewish greeting, and Paul fills both with Christ, signaling that in Jesus, divided worlds become one family.

2. Paul Thanks God Before He Preaches (vv. 3-8)

When Paul hears that Colossae is in danger, his first move is not a letter of correction. It is a prayer of thanksgiving. He thanks God, not the Colossians, for their faith in Christ, their love for

one another, and their hope stored up in heaven. This order matters: God gets the credit for the graces we see in his people.

Paul also points to what is conspicuously absent from his list. The Colossian heresy elevated a fourth virtue alongside faith, love, and hope: a special, elite, saving knowledge. Paul names the healthy trio and deliberately leaves knowledge out. His point is clear. It is not what we know that saves us. It is who we know. He also describes the gospel as a living organism, bearing fruit and growing, even in a shrinking city. The Colossians' impact was expanding even as their circumstances were contracting, because their true citizenship was elsewhere.

3. Paul Prays for Filled People, Not Fixed Circumstances (vv. 9-12)

When Paul prays, he does not ask God to fix Colossae's economy, reassign the false teachers, or make the church easier to lead. He prays that the people would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. The goal is not information about God but genuine knowledge of God, which Paul says grows like a relationship deepens over time, through shared experience, conversation, and sustained presence.

Paul then describes what a life rooted in that knowledge produces: four marks of walking worthy of the Lord. Bearing fruit in every good work, where good works are the fruit of a relationship with God, not the root. Growing in the knowledge of God, where knowing him is the sphere and the means of growth. Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, which produces endurance for hard circumstances and patience for hard people. And joyfully giving thanks, because God has already qualified his people for an inheritance they did not earn.

4. The Gospel Summary: Rescued, Transferred, Redeemed, Forgiven (vv. 13-14)

Paul closes the prayer with the gospel in two verses. God has rescued his people from the domain of darkness and transferred them into the kingdom of the Son he loves. The verbs are past tense. This is already done. Redemption and forgiveness are not future possibilities. They are present realities for everyone who is in Christ.

Dr. Cedrone applied this with pastoral honesty. Maybe your world feels small right now. Uninfluential. The moms in the carpool line, the men passed over at work, those in a season so long it feels permanent. Paul wrote from prison and never visited the church he was writing to. His world was as small as it gets. And yet his prayer is still changing lives two thousand years later. Your fruitfulness in the kingdom has never been measured by the size of your circumstances. It is measured by the size of your God.

ENGAGE WITH GOD IN A GROUP

- When you think about prayer in your own life right now, what are you most often asking God for? How does that compare to what Paul prays for the Colossians?
- Paul calls the Colossians "saints, faithful brothers and sisters, in Christ" before addressing any of their challenges. What does it mean to you personally that your identity in Christ is given, not earned?
- Paul's first response to hearing bad news about the Colossian church was thanksgiving, not correction. Think of a person or situation in your life where you tend to correct or fix first. What would it look like to pray and give thanks first instead?
- Dr. Cedrone pointed out that Paul intentionally omits "knowledge" from his faith-love-hope trio, countering a false teaching that made elite spiritual knowledge the path to God. Where do you see that same temptation today, placing knowledge, technique, or spiritual achievement above simple trust in Jesus?
- The four marks of walking worthy (bearing fruit, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened by his power, and joyfully giving thanks) are described as things that grow from the inside out, not a checklist to complete. Which of those four feels most alive in your life right now? Which feels most underdeveloped?

- Paul reminded the Colossians that they lived in Colossae but belonged "in Christ," and that their impact was expanding even as their city was shrinking. Where do you feel like your circumstances are limiting your fruitfulness? How does this passage speak to that?
- The sermon ended with a call to pray Paul's prayer over Bent Tree as we approach our 50th anniversary. What is one specific thing you can pray this week, for yourself or for this church, that moves from "fix my circumstances" toward "transform my people"?

BOTTOM LINE

Paul isn't praying for transformed circumstances; he's praying for transformed people.