



PRAY FOR PEOPLE, NOT CIRCUMSTANCES

Prayer: Our Foundation & Our Future | 7.5.26

Amy Cedrone

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Amy Cedrone 0:00

You know, this weekend America turned 250 years old. It's amazing when you think about it. So, we've been celebrating the Fourth of July, all that God has done. It's particularly impactful for me as a mom. My oldest son is a pilot in the United States Air Force, and so it's important, yeah, shout out, and it's important to celebrate this amazing country that we are citizens of, and you know, we've been celebrating, looking back at how it began, and there's real value in honoring the past and learning from the past, and you know the fireworks do begin to fizzle out as of this morning, but a deeper question still remains as those fireworks fizzle, not only about who we've been as a nation, but who are we becoming. What's the next 250 years going to be like, and incidentally, Bintree is asking the same question. What are the next 50 years going to be like? I asked Libin why he chose a series on prayer for this July, and he told me because as this church enters its 50th year, celebrates its 50th anniversary. He doesn't want us only looking back and celebrating what has been, but he wants us praying fervently for what's ahead. So all month we're looking back through the prayers of the New Testament, and what Libbon asked, and the leaders of this church have asked or pray is that scripture's own prayers will become the very language of the prayers of this church over the next 50 years, praying fervently for what's ahead, using those scriptures as a guide. We want God to shape our hearts into who He is calling us to become over the next 50 years. So let's dive into the word. We're going to go step by step through a prayer of Paul to the church at Colossae. So open your Bibles to chapter one, Colossians one. We're going to take a look at his prayer for the Colossian church and see what it has to say for us today. Before we dive in, I want to give you a little bit of insight as to what this book of the Bible is about. I want you to know what is the kind of letter that you have in your hand when you read Colossians, some commentators call Colossians the most Christ-centered epistle of all of Paul's writings. In fact, one commentator said it was perhaps the most Christ-centered book in the entire Bible. I might arm wrestle him for John being the most Christ-centered, but needless to say, you are going to see Christ on every page, the supremacy and the centrality of Christ. Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome during the same season in which he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. Colossians and Ephesians are kind of like sister epistles. They were delivered by the same messenger, they were sent to the same area in Asia Minor, now modern-day Turkey, and they were really around similar themes. So, as you read Ephesians, you might see some similar themes that you see in Colossians, but what do we know that's unique about the city of Colosse? It was a diverse city. It was made up of Jewish and non-Jewish believers, but the Bible calls it Gentiles. But here's the thing, by the time Paul wrote the letter to the church at Colossae. Colossians, Colossae was a dwindling, dying city. Colossians are the church at Colossae. The city of Colossae was a lot like Radiator Springs in the story of cars. Anybody seen the movie Cars? Yeah, so Colossae was Radiator Springs, if you might remember, in Radiator Springs, where Lightning McQueen breaks down and gets stuck. It was on Route 66 but there had been a new thoroughfare that passed around the city, and it caused that city to dwindle. That's essentially what happened at Colossae. The Roman roots had changed, it had diverted around the city, and what once had been an influential market city had now become, or was becoming, essentially a ghost town. It had once been a great city. The great British scholar, though, said JB Lightfoot said, quote the Colossians. Church was perhaps the least important to which any epistle of Paul is addressed. The least important, and yet Paul says that the gospel there was bearing fruit and growing all over the world.

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Their impact was expanding even as their city was declining, because their true citizenship that they understood was not in Colossae but in the kingdom of God, and that tension sets up the whole letter, and we'll come back to it. So, if you've spent any time in Paul's letter, you may know Galatians, and some of you were in my Bible study on Galatians last year. In Galatians, Paul comes to it alarmed. He uses extremely strong language because the church in Galatia had succumbed to

false teaching. You might remember he said, 'You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Really strong language, but Colossians hits different. There's no indication that this church had actually adopted the heresy circling around them. He knows they're in danger of being swayed by powerful cultural pressure to turn away, but they hadn't fallen yet. It's important to understand when you read Colossians that Paul is not disciplining the Colossians, instead he's discipling them, he's not disciplining them, he's discipling them, he's not correcting a church that has failed, he's building up a church so that it won't, and that's where we find ourselves. What exactly was the danger? What was this false teaching, sometimes called the Colossian heresy? It was something that we call syncretism. It's where there's a marriage of several different philosophies and belief systems all into one big spiritual soup. So, let me tell you the ingredients of that. First of all, there was a Jewish, a Jewish element of religious performance is part of the church was made up of people from Jewish backgrounds, things like circumcision, dietary laws, the observance of holy days. It was just they were saying, if you do these things, keep these rules, then you'll be acceptable to God. So that was one ingredient. Number two, there was an influence of something that I would call a proto Gnosticism. There's a heresy called Gnosticism that came to rise in the second century, but here in the first century we see this, this idea of Gnosticism starting to take root, especially in Asia Minor, where Colossae was. This philosophy taught that the physical world, it was was not real, that only the spiritual, mystical realm was real, and that salvation comes through a secret knowledge that you attain from that world. In Greek, it's called gnosis, G N O S I S. But here's the problem: if matter is evil and only spirit is real, then what do you do with Jesus, the man Jesus, who came in the flesh. The problem with not this proto-Nossa, is that the teaching could not fully account for a God who came in a body. It diminished the incarnation, it diminished God's Christ's bodily sacrifice, and therefore it diminished the power of the cross is salvation itself, and number three, there was a mystical polytheism that was probably born out of Greek worship, where Jesus was essentially invited to be a god in the pantheon, but, but he wasn't the supreme god that we know, so you have all these things working together that's producing this cultural pressure to kind of let their faith dwindle, to let it, let it fray, to not necessarily say Christ isn't real. There was a Christian veneer on this philosophy, but it diminished the power of Christ, so that's why Paul's response in Colossians is such a towering view of who Christ is, and we'll see what he does with that in this letter. He doesn't argue point by point against the heresy; instead, he exalts Christ so high that there's simply no room for anything else. I'd love for us to be a church like that, where we exalt Christ so high there's no room for anything else. So, let's dive in. Colossians one, verses one and two, it says Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints in Christ at Colossae, who are faithful brothers and sisters. Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We're not going to rush past that greeting, because in Paul's very first sentence he tosses out a theological grenade, if you will. He calls himself an apostle of Christ Jesus by. God's will, that word 'apostle, apostolos' in Greek means sent one, but he's not just any messenger, he was an eyewitness to the risen Christ there on the road to Damascus, personally commissioned by Jesus, speaking with Christ's own authority.

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When Paul talks, it's not advice, it's a dispatch from the throne, and that matters here, because Paul is writing to address a potential doctrinal crisis, a real threat to their faith. So he doesn't come as an expert making suggestions, instead he comes as an apostle making a case for Christ. It's interesting to me how he addresses the church. Paul calls them what they already are in Christ, even as he's about to address their potential loss of faithfulness. Calls them faithful. He uses three words: he calls them saints. Saints. Now, when I think of saints, sometimes I think of people you can pray to, leaders in the past church. You might think of them as the gospel writers or the 12 disciples. You might envision a stained glass window and halos, but this word hagios is something different. It's not a title that you earn through your good works. It's a status that you're given, a status that you're given. It means set apart for God's purposes. Every believer in that room at Colossae was a saint. Every believer in this room at Ben Tree is a saint. We are set apart because he has redeemed us and made us new. He set us apart from sin and death. And I love the symmetry here. Paul, the sent one, is addressing the set apart ones. Second, he calls them faithful, faithful brothers and sisters, and there's pastoral wisdom in that. Paul praises them as faithful, and in doing so calls out the identity he wants them to live into, even knowing the pressure they're facing to abandon their faith, and finally he calls them brothers and sisters, a Delphos. Remember, this is a diverse church, Jew and Gentile, different cultures, different backgrounds, different social strata, not unlike Bintrey. And Paul says you are one family, brothers and sisters together. But the phrase I really want you to see is in verse two the phrase in Christ. In Christ, that little phrase appears more than 160 times in Paul's letters. He wants us to understand this. It's not mystical language, either. It's positional. In fact, I think it's an address. It's an address that the believers in Colossae were in Colossae and in Christ, essentially two places at once. Paul is saying they live in two places at once, they are at the city of Colossae in Christ simultaneously. You know, this weekend we celebrated our citizenship as Americans, as we should. Thank you, Lord. And that citizenship is real. But hear me, what we have in Christ is not a dual citizenship. It's not a dual citizenship. We don't

carry two passports with equal claim on us. When God rescued us and transferred us into the kingdom of God, He didn't add His citizenship, He replaced our old one and gave us a new address in Christ. And here's why: our kingdom citizenship isn't secured by a document, it's secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We became citizens of the kingdom the moment we were made alive in Christ, and that's why it outranks everything. A passport can be revoked, but your status in Christ never can be. Never can be. Colossae is where they lived, in Christ is where they belonged. In the United States is where we live in Christ, is where we belong. Then Paul says, Grace to you and peace from God our Father. Grace to you and peace from God our Father. Now this sounds like a polite greeting, like dear friends or best wishes, or hey y'all, but it's not. It's so much more than that. In fact, grace, when they said 'grace, this word 'charis. This is actually a greeting that the Gentile believers would greet each other with 'peace. This word 'airine' or 'iren' - any Irene's in the crowd today - it means peace or shalom. And this was the greeting that Jewish believers would use to. Greet one another. Did you see what Paul did there? This brothers and sisters idea to a church made up of Jews and Gentiles. He combined a Greek greeting and the Jewish greeting and filled them both with Christ. In one sentence, he's already declaring in Jesus, your divided worlds become one family, one citizenship. Paul goes on in verses three through eight, and before he prays, he shows a deep appreciation and gratitude for the Colossian church.

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Verse three, he says, We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we pray for you, look at the title Paul uses in verse three. Our Lord Jesus Christ, matter of fact, I would underline that or highlight it. Those three words we often look at, like Jesus's first, middle, and last name, Lord Jesus Christ, but in this letter, each word is a direct counter to something the false teachers were denying. He calls Jesus Lord. This denotes his superiority, because they were denying his supreme authority over all things. He calls him Jesus. This denotes Christ's humanity, the word that he was the name that he was given his humanity, because they denied his real physical incarnation. Christ, the word for Messiah, this denotes his divinity, because the false teachers were denying that he was the Messiah, the anointed one born of God, so Paul's answer is to put the full weight of who Jesus is into his very opening line, Lord Jesus Christ, supreme human divine. We always thank our God, the God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we pray for you, notice the order of things. Paul certainly had issues to address, but he starts his prayer with thanksgiving. Notice who he thanks. He thanks God, not the Colossians. He thanks God for their faith and for their love. Paul recognizes that God is ultimately the one responsible for the graces we see in his people. One thing I want you to see here is that Paul prays for them before he preaches to them. He prays for them before he preaches to them. How are we doing with that? When you see somebody struggling spiritually or relationally in their faith, is it our first instinct to correct them or thank God for them and pray for them. He goes on, verse four, he says, "For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints, because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. Did you see what God.. what did you see what Paul was giving God thanks for? Faith, hope, and love. This is kind of a message on repeat in Paul's writings. Faith, hope, and love. You might see it in Romans five, first First Thessalonians one. A lot of us know it from First Corinthians 13. The greatest of these is love, faith, hope, and love, but this was actually Paul's shorthand for a healthy church. If a church was exhibiting faith, hope, and love, they were, by in all essence, a healthy church, faith, hope, and love. Here, their faith, if you'll notice, is anchored in Him, resting in Christ. It's less like an arrow shot at the middle of a target and more like an anchor from a boat set in a harbor. It anchored them there. The love that He talks about here is agape. It's expressed towards all the saints. Notice the word all. It's not this narrow exclusive circle of those who possess special knowledge, like the false teachers we're espousing, and hope Paul uses it here in its objective sense. This is not the feeling of hopefulness, but this is the thing hoped for, securely reserved for you in heaven, like a treasure with your name on it. Because listen, biblical hope is not wishful thinking. It's not, I hope the Cowboys win this year, although this is their year. This is it, is a confident expectation. An inward attitude resting on an objective reality. Our hope is reserved and stored up in heaven, and God himself is in charge of the storehouse. Our future is secure, and our salvation is secure. This is the hope that we have. This might be interesting to know, before we move on, what he deliberately left out of this passage. Knowledge, he did mention knowledge here, like he did in Philippians, in the Colossian heresy. Knowledge had been added as a fourth and essential virtue, the thing that completes you, a special mystical and elite knowledge that saves you. Church, hear this. It's not what we know that saves us, it's who we know that saves us. So look at how Paul describes the gospel in verse six.

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This good news, it says, from them it is bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it has among you since the day you heard it and came to truly appreciate God's grace. The Colossian church was a church full of God's grace and His gospel,

and it was making waves. He describes it as a living organism, something alive, reproducing and expanding. In the Greek, bearing fruit and growing are both present tense participles, meaning that they're ongoing, they're habitual, they're a continuous action. So it's like a tree, which bears fruit and at the very same time keeps on growing and producing all over the world. What Paul is saying here, he's not making a literal geographical claim here. Instead, his point is that the gospel is making headway across racial, national, and geographical bound barriers. Nothing can stop it. Radiator Springs was preaching the gospel, and it was going out a small declining town of shrinking influence, and the gospel was bearing fruit and growing there. Just imagine that. Let's move on to verse seven. He says, "You learn this from Epaphras, this Gospel, our dearly loved and fellow servant, He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and He has told us about your love in the spirit. Epaphras founded the church at Colossae. What's interesting to know is that Paul never went to Colossae, he'd never visited there, and it was likely that he never went there after his imprisonment. He had never been there. Epaphras was his spokesperson. He spoke on behalf of Paul. It was Epaphras who traveled all the way to Paul in Rome with the news that there was trouble in Colossae, that false teachers were gaining influence there. But notice what Paul focuses on first Epaphras is good report, that's what he focuses on, the love of the Colossian church in the spirit. There's wisdom for us to follow in our prayers here. There were other matters, less favorable ones, that Epaphras must have told Paul about, and Paul will get to them if you read the rest of the book, but he starts with what God has done, not what the enemy is doing. He starts with what God has done. Jot that somewhere down, jot that down somewhere in your spirit, because if, when we begin with what God has done and not what the enemy is doing, we put the focus on the one with all the power, and now we come to the heart of this passage in verse nine. It's the reason that we're here in this series. Verse nine through 14 is where Paul's pastoral heart really beats. Paul is asking the Colossians to lock in on their faith. It reminds me of last summer, our youngest son, Carter, who Michelle mentioned, was teaching swim lessons in our pool to two to six year olds. It's basically how not to die in a pool lessons, right? So, these are little bitty kids, and Avery, his precious wife, my daughter-in-law, that I call her, was at the time a kindergarten teacher, so she was there to assist, because there are six little guys in the pool, and things can kind of get chaotic, right, and and they're little, and they're going nuts, and Carter's like teaching them something that's really important for their safety, and he's getting a little frustrated. He leans in and he goes, "Guys, you need to lock in. And Avery goes, "Carter, maybe we should tell them to turn on their listening ears. They didn't understand this concept of lock in because they were not yet in. Sure, in their understanding of what it means to concentrate, so Avery said, 'Turn on your listening ears. Paul understood here that the Colossian church, even though it was young, was growing to a place where they could lock in, where they needed to lock in. They were past the time of turning on their listening ears, Paul was asking the Colossian church to lock in verse nine. He says, "For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. Hadn't stopped praying. Let that sink in. He had never visited Colossae. He never would visit Colossae, but he never stopped praying for them. How are we doing with that church? How are we doing with praying for people that we've never met, praying for people that we will never meet?

Amy Cedrone 25:57

How are we doing with that? How are we doing when people ask us to pray in a text message? I have a big test this morning. Will you pray? My grandmother is sick and in the hospital. Can you pray? I'm really worried about this, that, or the other. Will you pray? Do you pray? Do you just say, sure, I'll pray for you, and in there, what would it look like, church, if we were people that, when we got that kind of text, that we send a text prayer back to them, or if we're out on a walk and we see a friend come up and we could tell that they're struggling, we say, how are you doing today, and they say, I'm not doing well, instead of saying, well, I'll pray for you. What if we actually put our hand on their shoulder and pray for them right then and there, disrupting our walk? What if we start our prayer like that, not lip service, but actual prayer. There's power in prayer. There's fruitfulness in prayer. Let's see what Paul now says. He makes two prayer requests here of the Lord, and he says we are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. We're asking that you'll be filled with the knowledge of his will. This is his first request. Paul prays for knowledge. Isn't that funny? He left it out of the earlier list, but this is not the same knowledge that these false teachers were espousing. The false teachers were offering something called Gnosis. I mentioned it earlier. This is that secret, esoteric, mystical knowledge. Possess it, they said, and you'll be saved. And it was available only to the spiritual elites. But here Paul is talking about something called Epignosis, G N O S I S, Epidnosis. Paul prays for something else entirely. This is an intimate awareness of God's character and will, the kind of knowledge that grasps this object and is transformed by it. So, Gnostic knowledge or Gnosis is secret, exclusive, it's earned, but gospel knowledge, the knowledge that Paul is talking about here is revealed in Christ, available to all, and is grace given. This is the kind of knowledge that he's praying for. And here's the beautiful, beautiful part: it's available to anybody. In Colossians, Paul sees himself - Paul sees Christ himself as a perfection of that kind of knowledge, it's fulfilled in Christ. If he's essentially saying, if you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. A matter of fact, in the first verses

following our scripture today, he says Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Verse 15, the writer of Hebrews tells us that the sun is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being. He's saying, if you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus. If you want to know what He's like, look to Jesus. If you want to know Him, know Jesus. To be filled with knowledge means to have it pervade all of your being, your thoughts, your affections, your purposes, and your plans. This is not the knowledge that you just write in a notebook, it's a knowledge that's written all over your lives. And that phrase, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, is in a new request, it's a fuller expression of that first one, so this raises a question for us, have we confused knowing about God with knowing God? It is possible to be deeply informed yet spiritually shallow. Paul is not praying for more information, he's praying. For transformation, he goes on to say, so that is his second request, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, which brings us to Paul's. This is Paul's second request. Now, walk worthy. We sometimes hear that around here it can kind of be like churchy language, and I think it's a phrase that we should probably unpack, because I don't want anyone hearing walk worthy means doing good things for God or being good enough for God. That's not it at all. In scripture, your walk is simply your everyday life, the way you actually live step by step, and worthy here means acting in conformity with your union in Christ and His purpose for your life.

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In other words, living in a way that matches who you already are. It's interesting when our kids were young, after they had become believers in Jesus, when they messed up or maybe told a lie, we didn't say stop being such a liar, they're no liars in Christ, they are perfected, they are made holy, what their true identity is righteous in Him, truthful, that's who they really are, and when we sin, when they sin, it's like they're acting like something they're not, so we say, don't, don't lie, that's not who you are, you're a truthful person. Do you see the distinction? So, walking worthy is not about behavior management, it's aligning with your real identity. Walking worthy equals identity alignment, not behavior management, walking worthy is not the root, it's the fruit. It flows from the knowledge of God's will, not the other way around. You don't walk worthy in order to know God, you walk worthy because God knows you, you so there are four marks I think that Paul drills down on that are evidence of this worthy walk. It starts in the second half of verse 10. He says, bearing fruit in every good work, and knowing and growing in the knowledge of God, Epinosis, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. I think those four things are evident right here. Number one, bearing fruit in every good work. Mark number one: bearing fruit. This is a continual habitual fruitfulness, not a one-time event. If bearing fruit, or this concept of fruitfulness, is new to you, or feels churchy, here's the whole idea: fruit is visible evidence of an invisible root. Nobody nobody sees a tree's roots taking in the water that sustains it. Everyone just sees the apple or the fruit. Fruitfulness means a life so connected to God that good just grows out of it. Evidence that you're planted in Him in the root, and Paul is emphatic about the order, good works are the fruit, not the root of a right relationship with God. We don't do good works to get to God. Good works grow out of a life connected to God. So, bearing fruit. Number two, the second mark is growing in the knowledge of God. Growing in the knowledge of God. Think about how you get to know a person. You don't fully know someone the moment that you meet them, you spend time with them, you read their texts, their letters, you read about them, you spend time with them, you share meals with them, you have hard conversations with them. This is the growing in the knowledge of God that Paul is talking about here. We get to know God better the more we walk with Him. Number three, being strengthened with all power, it says in His word, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience. So that's our third mark. This is not a one-time infusion at conversion, but a habitual, ongoing dependence on God's power, and what is that power? What is that strengthening that he's talking about here? It's the same root word that Paul uses in Philippians 4:13 when he says, I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me, and the source of that strength, if you'll notice, is His glorious might. That it says literally in the Greek it means the might of His glory. The same power that created the universe and raised Jesus from the dead is available to you. His glorious might, the same power that raised Jesus. Is available to you. You might remember that from Ephesians 1, similar themes, same power that raised Jesus from the dead. And notice what this power produces, not fireworks, not spectacle, endurance and patience. Endurance and patience. You might have heard that endurance is for hard circumstances and patience is for hard people. This is probably this case here too, but both come from the same divine source.

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And number four, the fourth mark, he says joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light, the fourth mark of a walking of a of a walk that's worthy is joyfully giving thanks, giving thanks. This is the crowning virtue of the Christian life: gratitude, not a gritted teeth. Gratitude. Thank you so much. A joyful gratitude, and look what we're thanking him for, that we are enabled to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. This is this word

"enabled" is actually in the, in the aorist tense, and it means qualified. This is this points to a definitive one-time act at the time of conversion. This is not a gradual process or earning process. This is something that you already possess. You are already qualified. Caleb talked about it during worship this morning. God has qualified us for eternal life, not because of our behavior or good works. This is grace, pure and unearned. You don't apply for your inheritance. You are willed it by God Himself, and the trust was ratified by the blood of Christ. He rescued us, verse 13, from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son that He loves. In Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. This is how Paul closes his prayer. We are rescued, transferred, redeemed, and forgiven. This is the gospel in two verses. You are no longer citizens of the domain of darkness. You have been relocated, and your new address is the kingdom of the God who He loves, the kingdom of the Son God loves all past tense already done. Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome, and there's no indication that he ever made it to Colossae. His world, by every external measure was about as small as a world could get, and yet look at what this letter has done. 2000 years later, in this room, his prayer is still changing lives. That's what prayer does. 50 years from now, I will likely not see the next anniversary. 50 years ago, though, there were prayers being prayed for you right now that are still at work, prayers that I received from people like Barbara and Ari Robinson, as Tony and I stepped into mentoring life groups, prayers by people like Joanne Hummel, who encouraged me to step up and lead, prayers by people like Pete Briscoe, who gave me a stage to preach on, who believed in me for that, prayers for people like Margin Pierce and Mark Pierce over there, prayers as I stepped into missions, prayers that are being echoed in my life, and I would love to hear all of yours. Those prayers prayed 50 years ago in this church are still at work today. And what would it look like, Bent Tree, if we prayed for the church 50 years from now? We have a pattern right here in Colossians that we can pray for this church. Let's do that together, shall we? Why don't we stand up if you are a single person, if you or see a single person around you, pull them in, please. If you're an introvert and rather not pray in groups, you're free to sit and pray where you are, but let's clump up and let's pray for Bentry, the same prayer that Paul prayed for the church at Colossae, because that church still, that prayer still applies today. We're going to put it up on the screens for you, so you'll know what to pray for. Here are the two prayer requests: to be filled with the knowledge of His will and to walk worthy of the Lord. So, let's pray for our church, and in a few minutes I'll close this out. Let's pray, pray out loud with one another, I. Heavenly Father, we imagine a bent tree 50 years from now that has been shaped by your prayer, by Paul's prayer, a church known not primarily for its competence, though it is competent, but for its dependence on you. A church where our first response isn't to someone's struggle is not correction, but intercession.

Amy Cedrone 41:54

A church where every background, every generation greets one another with grace and shalom, and meets and means it, a church whose people know God, not just about Him, fully dependent upon Him, a church God that bears fruit far beyond its own zip code, not because our citizenship was never in Carrollton or Dallas or America, God, it's the kingdom of the Son that He loves, that's our citizenship. Father, we ask that Ben Tree would be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that we would walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to You, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to Your glorious might, so that we would have great endurance and patience, joyfully giving thanks to you, Father, because you have already qualified us to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. You've rescued us, you've transferred us, you've redeemed us, you have forgiven us. So make us a people and a church worthy of that calling for the next 50 years and beyond, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.