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| **KINGDOM PRISONER** |

Forty Daily Devotionals

from Paul’s Prison Epistles

(Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon)

(Based on the NKJV)

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| **Introduction** |

If you were put in prison for no other reason than sharing your faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ with others, what would you do? The Apostle Paul is a great example of what we should do in that situation. Instead of bemoaning *his* personal problems he began writing to others to help them with *their* personal problems. While Paul was in prison in Rome, he wrote letters to three churches (Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians), and one individual Christian (Philemon). In each of those letters he addressed the needs of others with very little mention of his own needs. Sometimes the best thing we can do while experiencing problems is to focus on the problems of others and to do our best to encourage them. I hope you will remember that these words were all written during some difficult days and times in Paul’s life and that you will consider his example next time you experience difficult times in your own life.

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| **Daily Reading Schedule** |

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| **Day** | **Scripture Reading** | **Date** |  | **Day** | **Scripture Reading** | **Date** |
| 1 | Acts 28:17-31 | 02/11/19 |  | 21 | Philippians 2:1-7 | 03/03/19 |
| 2 | Ephesians 1:1-12 | 02/12/19 |  | 22 | Philippians 2:8-17 | 03/04/19 |
| 3 | Ephesians 1:13-23 | 02/13/19 |  | 23 | Philippians 2:18-24 | 03/05/19 |
| 4 | Ephesians 2:1-10 | 02/14/19 |  | 24 | Philippians 2:25-30 | 03/06/19 |
| 5 | Ephesians 2:11-22 | 02/15/19 |  | 25 | Philippians 3:1-11 | 03/07/19 |
| 6 | Ephesians 3:1-12 | 02/16/19 |  | 26 | Philippians 3:12-21 | 03/08/19 |
| 7 | Ephesians 3:13-21 | 02/17/19 |  | 27 | Philippians 4:1-9 | 03/09/19 |
| 8 | Ephesians 4:1-10 | 02/18/19 |  | 28 | Philippians 4:10-23 | 03/10/19 |
| 9 | Ephesians 4:11-20 | 02/19/19 |  | 29 | Colossians 1:1-8 | 03/11/19 |
| 10 | Ephesians 4:21-32 | 02/20/19 |  | 30 | Colossians 1:9-18 | 03/12/19 |
| 11 | Ephesians 5:1-7 | 02/21/19 |  | 31 | Colossians 1:19-29 | 03/13/19 |
| 12 | Ephesians 5:8-16 | 02/22/19 |  | 32 | Colossians 2:1-12 | 03/14/19 |
| 13 | Ephesians 5:17-24 | 02/23/19 |  | 33 | Colossians 2:13-23 | 03/15/19 |
| 14 | Ephesians 5:25-33 | 02/24/19 |  | 34 | Colossians 3:1-8 | 03/16/19 |
| 15 | Ephesians 6:1-8 | 02/25/19 |  | 35 | Colossians 3:9-17 | 03/17/19 |
| 16 | Ephesians 6:9-16 | 02/26/19 |  | 36 | Colossians 3:18-4:1 | 03/18/19 |
| 17 | Ephesians 6:17-24 | 02/27/19 |  | 37 | Colossians 4:2-9 | 03/19/19 |
| 18 | Philippians 1:1-11 | 02/28/19 |  | 38 | Colossians 4:10-18 | 03/20/19 |
| 19 | Philippians 1:12-20 | 03/01/19 |  | 39 | Philemon 1:1-11 | 03/21/19 |
| 20 | Philippians 1:21-30 | 03/02/19 |  | 40 | Philemon 1:12-25 | 03/22/19 |

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| **Day 1: Acts 28:17-31** |

*“For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.” (Acts 28:20)*

***“For the Hope of Israel”***

Few people would be sitting in prison, in a foreign country, talking to people about *hope*! Nevertheless, that is exactly what Paul did. In the first verse of today’s Scripture reading we are told that “after three days” in Rome, “Paul called the leaders of the Jews together” (v. 17). Although Paul had a heart for all people, he customarily preached the gospel to the Jews first. In Romans 1:16 he declared: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for *everyone* who believes,” and then he added, “*for the Jew first* and also to the Greek.” When you read about Paul’s missionary journeys, we will see he often went immediately to the Jewish synagogue upon his arrival to a new area. So, even now, Paul spoke to the Jews first and said to them, “I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain” (v. 20). We are told that “many came to him at his lodging” and “he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets” (v. 23). But Paul never stopped with the Jews! Even while in prison he wrote letters to believers in faraway places that he would never visit again. For most of those churches these were the last words they ever heard from the apostle.

**Prayer Emphasis: Consider** what you might want to say to people if you knew it was probably going to be your last opportunity to communicate with them. **Live** with the realization that any words you speak to anyone might be your final words to them. **Make** every word count for Christ!

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| **Day 2: Ephesians 1:1-12** |

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3)*

***“Every Spiritual Blessing”***

I believe the days may be coming in America where people will be jailed for plainly preaching God’s truths, and those days may be coming sooner than we think! If I am ever imprisoned for preaching the gospel, you might get a letter from me. That letter might be very brief – maybe even one word: “Help!” But when Paul wrote to the believers at Ephesus, he did not begin his letter by sharing his *burdens* with them. Instead he began his letter by talking about his *blessings*. But note, he did not focus on his physical blessings, but the spiritual ones. Even though he was in prison, he still considered himself to be spiritually blessed “with every spiritual blessing” (v. 3). In other words, Paul didn’t think he was missing out on one thing *spiritually* because of where he was *physically*! God can find us anywhere and use us wherever He finds us. Even though Paul was sitting in prison, his heart was still fixed on “the heavenly places” to which he had been raised by Jesus Christ (v. 3) and no earthly situation was going to rob his spirit of his heavenly blessings! How wise we would be to always remember to count our blessings no matter how difficult and heavy our burdens may seem.

**Prayer Emphasis: Review** all of the spiritual blessings that Paul mentioned in Ephesians 1:4-12 and **realize** that those are all things we can have wherever we are. **Thank** God for your own “redemption through His blood,” the “forgiveness of sins,” and “the riches of His grace” (v. 7).

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| **Day 3: Ephesians 1:13-23** |

*“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.” (Ephesians 1:15-16)*

***Praying in Prison***

When Paul wrote to the Christians at Ephesus, he did not say, “Pray for me!” but instead, “I am praying for you!” (See v. 16.) We should not be at all surprised by that fact. The first time we read about Paul being in prison is in Acts 16. There we are told that Paul and Silas were arrested, dragged into court, severely beaten, shackled, and imprisoned. “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God” (see Acts 16:19-25). The Bible goes on to say, in that record, that while Paul and Silas were “praying and singing to God…*the prisoners were listening to them*.” Perhaps there in prison in Rome, Paul knew that where he was, and the fact that he now chose to speak only of his blessings to his fellow believers, would cause them to listen to him as well. Paul’s prayer for his fellow believers was not filled with glittering generalities, but with specific supplications. Look closely at verses 17-21 in today’s reading, and you will see the specific things for which Paul was praying. There is not one thing on Paul’s prayer list for those believers that would not be a good thing for all of us to have today. In verse 22, Paul described Jesus as “head over all things.” How wonderful would it be if all believers saw Jesus in that way no matter where they were in their own life experience!

**Prayer Emphasis: Realize** a shining light is most clearly seen in dark situations! **Allow** your light to shine in even the darkest moments in your life by expressing love and interest in the lives and needs of others. **Let someone know** you are praying for them today.

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| **Day 4: Ephesians 2:1-10** |

*“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)*

***Position and Purpose***

Today’s Scripture reading deals with the believer’s position and purpose. As to the believer’s position, we are told that we “sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (v. 6). The word “together” refers to Christ Jesus and that is why some translations read “God raised us up with Christ *and seated us with Him*.” To help us understand what that phrase should mean to us, Paul explains three important things. First, *he tells us what we were*. We *were* dead in trespasses and sins, disobedient people who walked after the ways of this world, and we *were* people who had been enslaved by the temptations and lusts of the flesh (vs. 1-3). After that, *Paul tells us what God did*! In verses 4-9 we see that God has “made us alive” and “raised us up.” That was not done because of any good thing we did. We are where we are because of God’s grace. Then, to help us to understand our purpose, *Paul tells us what we are now*. In verse 10 we learn that we are God’s workmanship and our purpose is to walk in the good works He has prepared for us.

**Prayer Emphasis: Seek** to fulfill God’s purpose for your own life. **Ask** Him to reveal that purpose to you and then search the Scriptures for God’s answer. **Remember** that God’s will and word never contradict one another. If God’s *word* says we are to walk in good works, then it is God’s *will* that we do so!

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| **Day 5: Ephesians 2:11-22** |

*“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.” (Ephesians 2:14)*

***No More Walls***

Yesterday we read about our being *raised up* to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Today we read about being *reconciled* to God “through the cross” (v. 16). Because the early churches were becoming integrated with believers from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, Paul wanted to address some specific issues relative to each of these nationalities. First, *he talked about what the Gentiles were*. In verses 11-12 he explained that the Gentiles had been “without Christ” and, because of that, they were at one time hopeless and “without God.” In the eyes of the Jews, they were strangers, aliens, and foreigners and were not even allowed in the temple. Second, in verses 13-17, Paul went on to explain *what God did for the Gentiles*. He tore down the wall of separation between the Jews and the Gentiles so that those who were once made to feel as if they were “afar off” could now be near to God. Paul then explained *what the Jews and Gentiles are now*. The closing verses of chapter 2 clearly show that, under grace, all people have equal access to God. Thanks to the work of Jesus on the cross, every believer can enter boldly into the Holy of Holies and meet with God. Paul closes with a picture of the church as a temple or building that is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets and likens each believer to a stone in that building.

**Prayer Emphasis: Find** your God-ordained place of service in the church and **fill** it. **Welcome** others into the church and realize God has a purpose for them as well. **Believe** that every person is important to Christ and that we should never make anyone feel unwanted or unwelcome.

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| **Day 6: Ephesians 3:1-12** |

*“…Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles.” (Ephesians 3:1)*

***Paul’s Self-Evaluation***

We can learn a lot about Paul from the “self-evaluation” he provides for us in today’s verses. First, *he referred to himself as a “prisoner.”* Although this statement has a spiritual application, Paul was literally a prisoner in Rome at the time he was writing these words. In verse 1, he referred to himself as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus.” He later referred to himself as “the prisoner of the Lord” in this same letter (4:1), and “a prisoner of Christ Jesus” in his final prison epistle (Philemon 1:1). In Acts 22, you can read where Paul was beaten and imprisoned simply because he stated that God was going to send him “to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21). That is why Paul here referred to himself as a prisoner “for you Gentiles” (v. 1). In verse 7, *Paul referred to himself as a* *“minister.”*  Few ministers see themselves as servants today, but that is exactly what the word “minister” means. The word translated “minister” here is the same word that is translated “servant” in Mark 9:35. Finally, *Paul referred to himself as a preacher* who was called to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles (v. 8).

**Prayer Emphasis: Perform** your own spiritual evaluation and see how you might best describe your “job titles” in God’s Kingdom work. **Remember**, in God’s Kingdom, the position of “servant” is an honored one! **Seek** to be of spiritual service to someone in need of help today.

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| **Day 7: Ephesians 3:13-21** |

*“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 3:14)*

***Paul’s Prayer List***

In today’s reading we find Paul asking something of the believers in Ephesus: “Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations” (v. 13). Then, we find the great apostle asking something of the Father: “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14). In chapter one, Paul told these believers that he never ceased “to give thanks” or in “making mention of (them) in (his) prayers” (1:16). In that prayer, Paul’s desire for these believers was that they might be *enlightened* (1:17-23). Here, in this second prayer, he prays that they might be *enabled*. Paul wanted them to *learn* about the Christian life and then *live* it out before the world! He prays for them to have spiritual strength and that they might be empowered by the Word. He prays they would be rooted and established in love and that they might somehow comprehend the depth of God’s love for them. What he really wanted was for them to be filled with what he referred to as “the fullness of God” (v. 19). In other words, he wanted them to have everything God had made available to them as his children. He reminded his Ephesian friends that they served a God “who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all” that we could even imagine to “ask or think” (v. 20).

**Prayer Emphasis: Create** your own spiritual needs prayer list and then daily ask God to meet those needs. **Pray** daily about these needs and see if God does not begin to do some amazing in your life. **Remember**, Christians are to be *enlightened* by God’s Word and *empowered* by prayer.

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| **Day 8: Ephesians 4:1-10** |

*“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” (Ephesians 4:1)*

***Called to Unity***

In the Bible, a believer’s lifestyle is often referred to as their “walk.” The word translated walk in Ephesians 4:1 is translated “live” in some translations of the Bible. However, in most translations you find the word “worthy” in Ephesians 4:1 and the word “unity” in 4:3. Whether you want to say “walk” or “live” you should actually desire to “walk” or “live” in a way that is “worthy” of a Christian and our “calling.” That calling is to unity! Paul has a few things to say about the lifestyle a believer should live out before the world in today’s verses. Because we are told to be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (v. 3), it is apparent that one of the main goals of every Christian is to maintain a spirit of oneness, or unity, with other believers. Take a moment to circle the word “one” every time you read it in today’s Scripture. Doing so will help us to understand that unity has something to do with our having unity within our own local church and the body of Christ as a whole. The *source* of our unity is found in verses 4-6 where we are told that we all serve one God. The *secret* to having unity in the church is found in verses 7-10 where we are told that we are all saved and serving because of God’s grace!

**Prayer Emphasis: Ask** yourself if you are “endeavoring” (NKJV), “diligently keeping” (HCSB), “eager to maintain” (ESV), or if you “make every effort” (NIV) to keep unity and peace in the church. Believers should be wise enough to know the importance and value of unity within the church and willing enough to do whatever it takes to maintain it.

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| **Day 9: Ephesians 4:11-20** |

*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,” (Ephesians 4:11-12)*

***The Gifts and Goals of Leadership***

When it comes to assigning ministry positions and gifts in the church, God has decided that divine responsibility is something that only “He Himself” can do. In verse 11 of today’s reading, we find that the work of leadership in the church is four-fold because the title “pastors and teachers” (v. 11), refers to one person and position. Notice the duty of church leadership. They are to be “*equipping*…the saints for the work of ministry” and, thereby, “*edifying* …the body of Christ” (v. 11). The word translated “edifying” here simply means “building up.” How wise we would be if we realized that the church building is more about *people* than it is about *places*! Notice also the *duration* of the duty that is assigned to leadership: They are to be continually working “till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13). Then notice the *desire* of leadership. It should be to enable believers to “no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (v. 14).

**Prayer Emphasis: Realize** that the goal and responsibility of spiritual leadership is to *equip* believers “for the work of ministry” and, thereby, *edify* “the body of Christ” (v. 11). If we will allow God to grow us, then God can use us to help grow the church! Are you aware of your spiritual gift(s)? Do you know how God has “equipped” you for service? **Call** the church office and ask for a Spiritual Gifts Survey today!

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| **Day 10: Ephesians 4:21-32** |

*“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)*

***Christianity Described, Plain and Simple***

The more we learn from the Bible, the more we learn about the Christian’s duty as a soldier and servant for Christ. The first verses of today’s Scripture reading (vs. 21-28) have much to say about *how a Christian is to* *act*. Paul includes some things that we should “put off” (v. 22), some things that we should “put on” (v. 24), and some things that we should be “putting away” (v. 25). We are to make every effort to avoid ever becoming angry and quick to get over it when we do! We are to come by things honestly, working hard so that we might have enough to meet own needs and enough to share with others. Verse 29 helps us to better understand *how a Christian is to* *speak*. Our words should be wholesome and helpful and should build others up. Our words should be a benefit to those who hear them. Verses 30-32 should help us see *how a Christian is to think*. We should not be bitter, angry, or malicious in our thinking. Our thoughts should be kind and compassionate. We should be willing to forgive others because we live every day with the realization and appreciation of the fact that we have been forgiven by Christ.

**Prayer Emphasis: Leave** your personal devotional time determined to **act** on what you learn from Christ, to **speak** about what you have in Christ, and to **think** like Christ wants you to think. **Determine** to spend your day being a Christian, plain and simple!

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| **Day 11: Ephesians 5:1-7** |

*“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” (Ephesians 5:1-2)*

***“Imitators of God”***

When the Holy Spirit led Paul to write: “be imitators of God,” He had him write it as a command and not a suggestion! The word “therefore” that precedes that command refers back to the final phrase in Ephesians 4:32, “Christ forgave you.” Because of the great love God has shown to us through His Son by forgiving us of our sin debt, we are to exhibit that great love to others. As such, we are commanded to imitate Christ and “walk in love” (v. 2). The word that is translated “imitators” in verse 1 comes from a Greek root word from which we get our English word “mimic.” When we “walk in love” we will be better *equipped* believers who are able to avoid the selfish and sinful snares described in verses 3-5. When we “walk in love” we will also be better *educated* believers who will not be easily deceived by the “empty words” of those around us (v. 6). The Greek word that is translated “empty” in verse 6 is translated “vain” or “foolish” in other translations. The most literal meaning of this word means “to be empty” or “to be without.” When we keep this verse in context, we must assume that what the “empty” words were “empty” of was love!

**Prayer Emphasis:** It is an old idea, but a good one: Before saying or doing anything today, **ask** yourself, “What would Jesus say or do in this same situation?” **Refuse** to be aligned with the “sons of disobedience” that are referenced in Ephesians 5:6.

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| **Day 12: Ephesians 5:8-16** |

*“For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light…finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:8 & 10)*

***“Walk As Children of Light”***

The first seven verses of chapter 5 taught us that a believer is to *walk in love*. Moving on, Paul went on to tell the Ephesian believers, and us, that we should also *walk in the light* (vs. 7-14). Just like our walking in love, our walking in light will better enable us to avoid becoming “partakers” (v. 7) of the evil things that surround us. The word that is translated “partakers” there is used only in Ephesians – and then very sparingly. In Ephesians 3:6 we were told that the Gentiles had become “partakers” of God’s “promise in Christ through the gospel.” As such, we have no business becoming partners with the world and its ways. Light can have no fellowship with darkness. One has to give way to the other. When we walk in the light, we learn to walk in ways that are “acceptable to the Lord” (v. 10), and we will “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,” but will “expose” them for what they are (v. 11). Walking in the light allows us to walk wisely and in paths that are clearly illuminated by God’s Word. As a result, we will live to “walk circumspectly” and as “wise” followers of Christ who are “redeeming” their time instead of just spending it (v. 15). To be “redeeming” our time (v. 16) means to use it wisely for every God-given opportunity.

**Prayer Emphasis: Watch** how you walk! **Love** God enough to **partner** with him and **be a light** in a very dark world. **Realize** this does not always prove to be popular with some, but always **remember** it is God that we should desire to please.

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| **Day 13: Ephesians 5:17-24** |

*“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,” (Ephesians 5:18)*

***Some Killer “Be’s”***

There are several things we are told to “be” in the Book of Ephesians. In the first part of chapter 5 we were told to “be imitators of God” (v. 1). Now, here in 5:18, we are told to “be filled with the Spirit.” Back in 3:16 we were told to “be strengthened with might through His Spirit.” It is only when we are filled with God’s Spirit that we can be empowered and enabled to walk in love and light. In today’s and tomorrow’s readings, we will see how the presence and power of the Holy Spirit can enable us to be lights at home and at work – showing the way for our spouses, children, parents, and business associates. The coming of the Holy Spirit completely changed the way that church was to be. He who lives within us cannot be contained within the walls of a building. He goes with us everywhere we go and wants to make Christ known to all people. He has saturated every part of our being and there is no place within us where He can be locked away and hidden from the world and the people with whom we live and associate. His influence will be evident in the words we speak, the songs we sing, and the way we submit to one another. Notice that these evidences of the Holy Spirit are first exhibited in the home and between marriage partners. From the home it will spread to the workplace and every other place that we go.

**Prayer Emphasis: Ask** yourself, “Is the presence of the Holy Spirit evident in my life? Could my spouse or children bear testimony that I am a faithful follower of Christ?” Believers are to be so filled with the Spirit that it is evident to everyone we know and to all with whom we come in contact!

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| **Day 14: Ephesians 5:25-33** |

*“For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.” (Ephesians 5:30)*

***“Members”***

A key to understanding the believer’s walk is found in Ephesians 5:30. We have become one with Christ and, therefore, we (believers) have all become a “member” (literally “part”) of His body, the church. We are not to function independently of Him or to do anything to or with anyone that He would not do. That is why a man should “love” (v. 25) his wife and give his life to her. That is why a woman should see that she “respects” (v. 33) her husband. When we understand that we are a “part” of God’s family and body, we will cease to think only of ourselves. That attitude will bring about some very powerful and positive changes in our marriages and in our homes. We will then be able to raise our children and teach them to also become followers of Christ. There can be no greater joy than seeing our children find their place in the body of Christ and begin to be a part of the solution to this world’s greatest needs. In the church, home, and workplace, the Holy Spirit’s presence reminds us that we are a part of something very important. He knows well how to be a “part” of something because he is a “part” of what we call the Trinity or Triune God. We cannot separate God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit. We must acknowledge that they are three and yet one. In the same way, we believers are all one in Christ.

**Prayer Emphasis: Find** a place of service in the church and be a real “part” of its ministry. **Allow** the Holy Spirit to help you become a part of something bigger than yourself. **Realize** that being a member of a church has more to do with *having* a *role* and not just being *on* a *roll*! **Remember**, all “members” are vital “parts” in the functioning of the church.

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| **Day 15: Ephesians 6:1-8** |

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’” (Ephesians 6:1-3)*

***Two Commands for Christian Children***

Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write to all of the Ephesian believers, including the children. The Greek word translated “children” in Ephesians 6:1 is used in several ways in the New Testament. One of those ways is to refer to the relationship between a teacher and his students. For example, John referred to his fellow believers as “children of God” (1 John 3:10) and later referred to his own disciples as his “children” (3 John 1:4). However, since Paul had just finished a section on husbands and wives, it is most likely that he was speaking to literal “children” here, the offspring of the Ephesian believers. He had two very important commands for these “children.” First, they were to “obey (their) parents in the Lord” (v. 1). The word translated “obey” here means simply that! It is used again in verse 5 to instruct servants to “be obedient” to their “masters.” As such, we see that God intended for parents to be authority figures in the lives of their children. Secondly, Christian children are commanded to “honor (their) father and mother” (v. 2). Although the way we honor our parents may change in *practice* over the years, it never changes in *principle*. It is a life-long responsibility for every believer.

**Prayer Emphasis: Notice** that the honor and obedience that God expects to be exhibited in the lives of his “children” is to be heart-felt, or “from the heart” (v. 6). It is something that is to be done in “goodwill” as if we were doing it “to the Lord, and not to men” (v. 7).

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| **Day 16: Ephesians 6:9-16** |

*“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” (Ephesians 6:10)*

***Another Very Important “Be”***

Having already written to the believers in Ephesus about their *wealth*, *worth*, and *walk,* Paul closed out his letter with some very valuable information about their *warfare*. In any warfare, *it is important to know something about your enemy*. In vs. 10-12 we learn that Satan (the “devil”) has many “wiles” (“schemes” or “tactics”) that are employed for one purpose – to cause the believer to not “stand” when he wages war “against” us. Every Christian needs to understand that we do not fight against *people* (“flesh and blood”) but against a *power* that represents sin and darkness. When our battles are against “flesh and blood” they may cease to be spiritual. God never forgets that Satan is the enemy, and neither should we. We read on and learn that, in any warfare, *it is important that we know something about our equipment*. Our equipment is likened to the different parts of a Roman soldier’s armor. God used these illustrations because everyone who read these words could easily visualize these pieces of armor and understand their purpose or function. Our armor is truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Sword. In the first five pieces of armor we find our *protection* from the enemy’s weapons. In the final piece of armor, we find our *power* over the enemy’s warfare. Notice that we have “the” Sword and not just “a” Sword.

**Prayer Emphasis: Remember**, we can never trust anything Satan has to say to us! **Recognize** he is our enemy and he has nothing but spiritual disaster in mind for us! **Resist** him daily!

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| **Day 17: Ephesians 6:17-24** |

*“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints – and for me….” (Ephesians 6:18-19a)*

***The Importance of Prayer***

We have recently read about the *saint’s* *enemy* and the *soldier’s* *equipment*. Now we are to learn about our *source of* *energy*. The power to overcome the wicked one is not found in the strength of the flesh, but in the Holy Spirit. We are to be praying “always” (v. 18). There is never a time when the believer should not be praying because there is never a time when we are not involved in warfare. The Word of God and prayer has always been God’s program for the church and its victory over the enemy. We are to be praying for “all the saints” (v. 18). This is no time for selective supplications that are only concerned with the needs of our own lives and the lives of our families and friends. This is a time for all believers, everywhere, to be praying for a world-wide empowering of the Spirit that will allow the church to attack the gates of hell and break them down for the Kingdom of God! Just as we are to pray for all *saints*, we are to pray for all *servants* as well. Paul seldom asked people for anything, but when he did, it was most often for their prayers. His preaching had caused him to be imprisoned and placed “in chains” (v. 20), so he humbly added the phrase, “and for me” (v. 19).

**Prayer Emphasis: Pray** for your fellow Christians today and let them know that you have done so. **Pray** for your own church pastors and staff and send someone an encouraging note to say you are praying for them. **Exhibit** perseverance in your prayer life – **pray** and keep on praying!

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| **Day 18: Philippians 1:1-11** |

*“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you with all joy.” (Philippians 1:3-4)*

***Paul’s Joy***

Philippians has often been referred to as the epistle of joy. This might be difficult for some to understand, because Paul’s circumstances were anything but joyful. He had been arrested and taken to Rome. He wrote this letter while in prison there. How could he write so much about joy from a prison cell? He could do so because the gospel was the most important thing in his life. He had learned that he could find ways to spread the gospel no matter where he was. In the NKJV we see the word “gospel” six times in the first chapter of this book and the word “Christ” 17 times! It is obvious that Paul’s joy was based on his *purpose* and his purpose was based on a *person*! After the typical salutation and introduction, Paul immediately let the believers in Philippi know that he was thankful for their “fellowship” in the gospel ministry (v. 5). Even in what might seem to be dire circumstances, Paul prayed for others, asking God to continue to use the church at Philippi to be a blessing to others. He said to them, “I have you in my heart” (v. 7) and I love you with “the affection of Jesus Christ” (v. 8). Verses 9-11 could be called Paul’s “Prayer List.” Take a moment and underscore the things that he asked God to do for the Philippian Christians.

**Prayer Emphasis:** Using verses 9-11 as a guide, **pray**, asking God to bless our church with the things that Paul desired for these Christians. **Pray** for the many Christians that are imprisoned for their faith. **Thank God** for some specific, difficult experience that led you to a stronger faith in Him. **Believe** that Christians can experience joy in any circumstance or situation.

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| **Day 19: Philippians 1:12-20** |

*“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.” (Philippians 1:18)*

***“I Rejoice”***

After reading some of Paul’s other letters and hearing him share with others about the many trials and tribulations he had suffered, it is interesting to note that he says very little about that in this letter. He seemed to sum all of his talk of suffering up in one phrase when he mentioned, “the things which happened to me” (v. 12). He then entered into a song of praise for the fact that God had used his sufferings to encourage others to preach the gospel. Even the guards and others in the palace were aware that Paul was imprisoned for one thing only – his commitment to share Jesus Christ with everyone he met. Wherever people were, when they learned of Paul’s “chains” (v. 13), they soon began to talk about Jesus! Paul’s paramount and consuming desire was that Christ would be “magnified” (v. 20) whether through his life or his death. Verse 18 records Paul, even though he is sitting in a prison, clearly saying, “I rejoice” (present tense) and I “will rejoice” (future tense). This kind of joy is what we will find Paul sharing with his Christian friends at Philippi and encouraging them to expect and express in and through their own lives.

**Prayer Emphasis: Take** some private time and **rejoice** in your own salvation today. Then, publicly **express** that joy to someone that you communicate with today. **Rejoice** now, in whatever present situation you may find yourself, and **commit** to rejoicing in any situation that you may be called to face in your future.

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| **Day 20: Philippians 1:21-30** |

*“And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith.” (Philippians 1:25)*

***“J-O-Y!”***

If you haven’t heard that J-O-Y stands for, “Jesus, Others, and You!” then you haven’t been in church for very long. This little acrostic tool has become a good way to remind us that “joy” abides within those who allow Christ to rule over their priorities. As we read through Philippians, we can see the verses from which this little saying was born. Back in verse 20, Paul clearly put Jesus Christ first. His exaltation was the greatest priority in Paul’s life. Then Paul clearly put others second. He was willing to be wherever God could use him the most and continue in his present situation if it was best for others. He told these believers: “to remain in the flesh is more needful for *you*” (v. 24). It is equally clear that Paul put himself last. A Christian’s joy can help us all to “C” things in a different light, no matter the situation. Take a moment to circle some of the important “C” words in today’s verses. In the NKJV you will find: confident, continue, Christ, coming, conduct, and conflict. In the NIV you will find: convinced, continue, Christ, conduct, come, and contending. However you “C” it, joy has a role in all of these different areas of the believer’s life.

**Prayer Emphasis: Overcome** the desire to put yourself first by seeking to elevate the roles of Jesus and others in your life and personal ministry. **Do** something very “others oriented” at your earliest convenience today and **seek** to find joy in contributing to the personal happiness of someone else. **Ask** God to help you to do the difficult thing: Putting yourself last!

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| **Day 21: Philippians 2:1-7** |

*“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:3-4)*

***“Others”***

When Paul encouraged the believers at Philippi to, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit” (v. 3), he was admonishing them to avoid self-centered thinking or actions that were motivated by their own ambitions or needs. Some translations use words such as “rivalry” or “strife” to help convey the meaning of what Paul was urging these believers NOT to do. He did not want them to see the Christian life as a competition for the “Who Can Be the Best Christian” award. The word “conceit” in our focus verse simply meant that what we do for “others” should not be done in a way that brings praise or glory to ourselves. In “lowliness” or humility “of mind” we are to “esteem (value) others better than” ourselves (v. 3). The fact that this is Paul’s message to all believers is found in the words “each” and “each of you” (vs. 3 & 4). In every thought or action, believers are to ask themselves how those thoughts or actions might impact the lives of others. If we focus on trying to treat others “better” than we would want to be treated ourselves, then we will have taken the Golden Rule to an entirely different level!

**Prayer Emphasis: Seek** to do the “better” thing every time an opportunity to serve others presents itself. **Refuse** to push your way to the forefront or to promote yourself in any way. **Make** every effort to put Christ and others first in your life

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| **Day 22: Philippians 2:8-17** |

*“Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.” (Philippians 2:17)*

***Getting our “Mind” Right!***

A submissive mind always leads to sacrifice and service. In yesterday’s reading, we saw that to be true of Christ (2:7-8). Now, in today’s focus verse, we see that this was also true of Paul. The words “sacrifice” and “service” are found in this verse – and in almost every translation of the Bible. In the NKJV, the words “sacrifice and service” are followed by “I am glad and rejoice.” Some translations substitute the word “joy” in the place of “glad” in that verse. In either case, as you read these verses, remind yourself that nothing had changed about Paul’s situation. He was still in prison. He was still suffering for the cause of Christ. He was still in chains. Actually, his situation seemed to be growing worse and the possibility of his death growing more probable. However, his attitude was one of joy and not of sorrow. He encouraged the Christians at Philippi to live “without complaining and disputing” (v. 14). In doing so, they would “shine as lights” in a very dark world (v. 15). We know that the stars are always there, but they are most visible against the darkness of night. When we have the right attitude about suffering and sacrifice, we will most assuredly *stand up* for Christ and *stand out* in the darkness!

**Prayer Emphasis: Look** for some way to encourage a fellow believer today. **Express** joy in every situation and others will join you in your praise to the Lord. **Pray** that the joy of the Lord will be evident in our church and that we will shine as lights to our world. **Realize** it is only when we allow God to change our attitudes that we will be empowered to help Him change the world!

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| **Day 23: Philippians 2:18-24** |

*“But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.” (Philippians 2:19-20)*

***Timothy***

We learned earlier that a submissive mind leads to sacrifice and service and that sacrifice and service lead to joy and rejoicing. Just as it was with Jesus and Paul (2:7-8 and 2:17) so it was with Timothy (2:19-22). Paul stated that he was going to send Timothy to visit the Christians at Philippi. He paid this young man quite a compliment when he said he had no one who was “like-minded” with him like Timothy (v. 20). Some translations choose to use phrases like “no one else like him” to express what Paul was trying to say here. The NKJV hits the nail right on the head with the word “like-minded.” This word is translated from two Greek words with the first meaning “equal” or “same” and the second meaning “soul” or “life.” Later, Paul would describe Timothy as one who had, even from his childhood, “known the Holy Scriptures” (2 Timothy 3:15). The attitude of this young preacher was marked by unselfishness and service (vs. 21-22). While others were busy looking out for themselves, Timothy was busy looking after the needs of others and serving with Paul in the ministry of the gospel.

**Prayer Emphasis: Refuse** to be the Christian that breaks the chain of sacrifice and service. **Remember** that sacrifice was born in the heart of God and it is one of the ways He will use us to reach the hearts of men. When we serve the Lord, and make sacrifices for His cause, we continue a tradition that began with Christ and lives on through his saints today.

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| **Day 24: Philippians 2:25-30** |

*“Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need.” (Philippians 2:25)*

***Epaphroditus***

Although this man is mentioned again in Philippians 4:18, most of what we know about Epaphroditus is found here in Philippians 2:25-30. From these verses it is easy to see that this young man, like Paul and Timothy, also had the heart-attitude of Christ. He was willing to sacrifice for the cause of the cross. He lived, “not regarding his life” or, more literally, “risking his life” (v. 30) so that others could know Christ as Savior. Epaphroditus had first come to Paul bearing a love gift – a spiritual care package, if you will – and then remained with Paul to help him before returning to his hometown with this letter. Our focus verse reveals that Paul considered this man to be a “brother,” a “fellow worker,” and a “fellow soldier” in Christ. Earlier in this chapter we read where Paul said: “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interest of others” (v. 4). Obviously Ephaphroditus was a man who looked so after the interest of others that he forgot to take care of himself! We are told that he “ministered” to Paul’s “need” (v. 25) even though “he was sick almost unto death” (v. 27), and it was because of, or “for the work of Christ” that this young man “came close” to dying (v. 30).

**Prayer Emphasis: Re-read** our focus verse, and determine to be, like Epaphroditus, a very positive example to those around you. First, be a “brother,” a faithful and productive member of God’s family. Then, **be** a “fellow worker.” **Find** a place of service in the church and **fill** it. Then **be** a “fellow soldier” who serves as a “messenger” to the lost world around us!

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| **Day 25: Philippians 3:1-11** |

*“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.” (Philippians 3:1)*

***“Finally”***

The first word of this chapter in the NKJV, and other translations is, “Finally” (3:1). It serves as an indication that Paul is beginning a new section to this letter and is moving closer to his closing remarks. Because he was such a “religious” person before his salvation, Paul is careful to warn his readers against those who preach salvation by the keeping of the law and its many ceremonies. Verses 4-11 contain the first part of what we call Paul’s personal testimony. He has much to say about his past in these verses, and this is considered to be one of the most auto-biographical sections of all of his writings. He opens his heart and allows his readers to see that he had once trusted in his Jewish and religious background for his salvation. His religious pedigree was quite impressive. In compliance with the Jewish law, he was circumcised on the eighth day of his life. He was an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin. He was a Pharisee who maintained a lifestyle that was legalistically righteous to the extent that he referred to himself as “blameless” (v. 6). No wonder he referred to himself as “a Hebrew of Hebrews!” Yet, he learned that all of those religious awards could never lead to eternal rewards in heaven. He stated that he counted all of that to be “loss” (v. 8).

**Prayer Emphasis: Learn** to give a clear and concise testimony about your own salvation experience. **Practice** until you can stand before others and boldly share it in public. **Begin** with where you were before salvation and then **share** some of what God has done to bring you to where you are in Him today.

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| **Day 26: Philippians 3:12-21** |

*“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 3:20)*

***Paul’s Past, Present, and Future***

Paul’s personal testimony began with what his life was like before meeting Christ. His testimony continues by sharing what his life was like in his present walk with the Lord. In the first part of his testimony, *he talked about his past.*  He sounded like an accountant adding up the debits and credits in his life, hoping to finish his life with enough good works to merit heaven. Then *he talked about his present*. After meeting Christ, he begins to sound like an athlete. He likens the Christian life to a race and says that he is pressing toward the mark, or finish line. It appears this dedicated preacher senses that he is nearing the end of his “race” and that he desires to finish strong for the Lord. Then, in the last part of Paul’s testimony, *he talked about his future*. Athletes had to be citizens of the country they represented. In verse 20, Paul declared that the Christian’s “citizenship” was in heaven. Paul expected to see the Lord’s return at any time. He lived every day with the hope that he would be alive at the time of the rapture. His remark about how “the Lord Jesus Christ” would someday “transform our lowly body” (v. 21) reminds us of what he taught the Corinthians about the return of Christ and the rapture of the church. One way or another, Paul believed that a new, glorified body was in his future and that he would spend eternity in heaven.

**Prayer Emphasis: Declare** your own “citizenship” in heaven by boldly declaring your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. **Share** some of your past, present, and future in Christ with someone today.

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| **Day 27: Philippians 4:1-9** |

*“Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.” (Philippians 4:1)*

***“Stand Fast”***

The word “therefore” is a definite indication that Paul is nearing the end of this letter. In this final chapter, he encourages his Christian friends in this church to “stand fast” or, in other translations, to “stand firm” in the Lord. He then speaks to some definite things in which they should “stand fast.” First, he asks them to stand in peace. Two prominent women in the church, Euodias and Syntyche, were having a disagreement of some kind. We are not told what the disagreement was about. It might have been about something very spiritual, but, in any case, it was something that Paul felt needed to be addressed in the closing of this letter. It appears these two women who had once “labored” (v. 3) with Paul for the cause of the gospel were now contending with one another. The “true companion” (v. 3) that was assigned to help these women through their controversy was not identified by name. Maintaining peace in the church was important to Paul, and he wanted it to be important to these Christians. In verse 7, Paul speaks about “the peace of God”. When we are saved, we immediately have “peace *with* God” (Romans 5:1). As we serve, we are to do so in the “peace *of* God.” Paul sets forth a step-by-step process for experiencing peace. It is found in right praying (vs. 6-7), right thinking (v. 8), and right living (v. 9).

**Prayer Emphasis: Make** harmony and unity in the church a priority in your life. **Refuse** to participate in church quarrels or to even take sides among those who are quarrelling. **Remember** that believers are to fight the good fight and not to be fighting against one another.

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| **Day 28: Philippians 4:10-23** |

*“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)*

***“Stand Fast” (Part Two)***

In “Part One” of this devotional we saw that Paul desired that the Christians in the church at Philippi “stand fast” in God’s “*peace”* (vs. 1 & 7). He then talked about ways they could experience peace with one another. Now we will see that he also encourages them to “stand fast” in God’s *power* (vs. 10-13). Every Christian should memorize Philippians 4:13 and make it a part of their spiritual armor. There we learn that we, like Paul, can say that we can do “all things through Christ” who “strengthens” us. Paul believed that Christ alone was the source of the believer’s strength. Take a quick look at John 15:5 and you will see that Jesus taught the same thing! To attempt to live a godly life without the power of the indwelling Christ is harder than trying to nail jello to a tree! It just can’t be done! Lastly, Paul desired that the Christians in Philippi “stand fast” in God’s *provision* (vs. 14-23). We must remember that it is “God” who “shall supply all (our) need according to His riches in glory” and He will do so “by Christ Jesus” (v. 19). He then encouraged all Christians to give God “glory forever and ever.” To all of that Paul added, “Amen” (v. 20). And so should we!

**Prayer Emphasis: Memorize** Philippians 4:13 and 4:19. Make these two verses a part of your every prayer. **Ask** God to supply some “need” tonight – either for you, your family, or for someone you know. **Be** specific. **Share** your prayer request with the one for whom you prayed. **Remember** that believers do not serve the Lord in their *own* strength, but in the strength that *the Lord* has provided.

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| **Day 29: Colossians 1:1-8** |

*“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colosse.” (Colossians 1:1-2)*

***Meet Epaphras***

We have to remind ourselves that Paul wrote this letter while imprisoned in Rome. However, Paul did not even mention his “chains” to these believers until Colossians 4:3! (I probably would have mentioned my sufferings in the very first verse!) After his typical salutation, Paul stated that he heard some very good things about this church! He heard about their strong faith and the love they had for Christians everywhere. He heard of their strong hope of heaven. He considered the faith, love, and hope that was so evident in their lives to be evidence of their close relationship to Christ. How did this church become so strong in their faith, hope, and love? They “learned” it “from Epaphras” (v. 7)! Epaphras was a teacher and leader in the church at Colosse. He is mentioned only three times in the New Testament. The first reference is here in 1:7, where Paul refers to him as his “dear fellow servant” and “a faithful minister of Christ.” Later, in 4:12, he calls him “a bondservant of Christ.” He is mentioned once more (Philemon 23) where Paul calls him his “fellow prisoner.” Tradition states that Epaphras, a native of Colosse, was saved under Paul’s ministry in Ephesus and then returned to his home city to preach the gospel and establish a church there. That would make the believers in Colosse Paul’s spiritual “grandchildren.”

**Prayer Emphasis: Circle** the word “faithful” in Colossians 1:2. This is the first (and only) time that Paul referred to any group by this term in the salutation of a letter. Now **circle** the word “faithful” in 1:7 and note that it refers to Epaphras. Obviously faithful *ministers* are more likely to produce faithful *followers*.

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| **Day 30: Colossians 1:9-18** |

*“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” (Colossians 1:9)*

***Paul’s Prayer for the Colossians***

Pay careful attention to what Paul prayed for these believers at Colosse, because I assure you that God had all believers, everywhere and at all times, in mind when he inspired these words. First, *Paul prayed that believers be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and understanding* (v. 9). Then *he prayed that believers might “walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him”* (v. 10a). Next, *Paul prayed that believers would be “fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”* (v. 10b). But there is more! *Paul then prayed that believers be “strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power”* (v. 11). It is important to note that, when believers are “strengthened” by God’s “glorious power,” they will also have “patience and longsuffering with joy” (v. 11)! *Paul’s last prayer request for believers mentioned here is that they would be thankful* (v. 12). They were to be thankful for at least three things. First, they were now “partakers of the inheritance of the saints” (v. 12). Second, they were “delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed…into the kingdom of His love” (v. 13). And third, they had “redemption through His blood” and “the forgiveness of sins” (v. 14).

**Prayer Emphasis: Pray** for your fellow believers today, asking for them the same things that Paul asked for these Colossian believers and us. **Thank** God for your Christian inheritance, your deliverance from the power of sin, and your redemption through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ!

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| **Day 31: Colossians 1:19-29** |

*“…the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.” (Colossians 1:23)*

***“Every Creature”***

We should be careful not to overlook a very important phrase that Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write to us in Colossians 1:23. He was divinely inspired to write that “*the hope of the gospel*…was preached *to every creature* under heaven.” I emphasize that these words were divinely inspired because they reveal to us God’s own opinion about a much-discussed, often misunderstood, issue that is tossed about in religious circles today. The issue I am speaking of is that theological discussion of what is often referred to as “Calvinism,” “sovereign grace,” or “predestination.” There are some who would have us to believe that salvation is limited to only those that God has chosen and drawn to Himself through His irresistible grace. I do not believe God’s atonement is at all limited and I could reference many Bible verses here to support that belief. However, due to the limited space for these devotionals, I will use only our focus verse to make a very important point to support the belief that God’s eternal plan for salvation is for all people, of all times, and in all places. If not, then why would Paul, under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, state in our focus verse that “the hope of the gospel…was preached to every creature”?

**Prayer Emphasis: Read** the last part of 2 Peter 3:9 where God’s word states that God is “not willing that *any* should perish but that *all* should come to repentance.” **Remember**, Titus 2:11 states: “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to *all* men” and that God “commands *all* men *everywhere* to repent” (Acts 17:30).

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| **Day 32: Colossians 2:1-12** |

*“Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.” (Colossians 2:4)*

***An Important Warning***

In chapter 2, Paul is going to sound out three warnings to the believers at Colosse. It is important for us to remember that these warnings are just as much for us today as they were for these Christians at that time. I am going to discuss the first of these warnings today and then the second and third in the next devotional. First, in verse 4, Paul warned the believers at Colosse to avoid being deceived by “persuasive words.” Some translations use terms like “persuasive,” “plausible,” “false,” or even “fine-sounding arguments” to help us to better understand Paul’s concern. Another highly trusted translation describes these “persuasive words” as “enticing words.” These Christians needed to “beware” or as some translations read, to “see to it” that no one “cheat” them by teaching them doctrines that were based on the philosophies and traditions of this world and not on Christ (v. 8). The best way to test any teaching is to ask one question: “Does what is being taught make Christ superior to everyone and everything else?” If not, then it is not doing justice to the One in whom “all the fullness” of God dwells (v. 9)! In the NKJV, you will see the two words “in Him” five times in these first 12 verses of Colossians 2. Those two words should help us remember that salvation is in a *Person* – and not through some *philosophy*!

**Prayer Emphasis: Ask** God to give you the wisdom to avoid following after any teacher or preacher that does not exalt Christ as the one and only way to God and salvation. **Reject** any gospel that is Christ “plus” anything! **Realize** that “good preaching” is more about *what* is said than *how* it is said.

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| **Day 33: Colossians 2:13-23** |

*“Having wiped out the handwriting of the requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ” (Colossians 2:14)*

***Two More Warnings***

After warning the Colossian believers to *beware of “persuasive words”* (v. 4), Paul then warned them to *beware of religious legalism* (v. 14) and “*false humility”* (v. 18). It was false teachers who were using the aforementioned “persuasive words,” and they were using them to try to entice these new believers to embrace the legalistic practices of the Jews. These false teachers had blended a little of everything into the mixture in order to appeal to the religious beliefs to everyone who listened. For these believers, the temptation was to hold on to the traditions of the Jewish faith. Paul taught that believers had been forgiven of all sins, and that the “handwriting” (v. 14) was cancelled and nailed to the cross with Jesus. At the cross, Jesus “disarmed principalities and powers” by making “a public spectacle of them” and “triumphing over them” (v. 15). Our Lord’s death on the cross “triumphed” over the law in the sense that it accomplished that which the law or religion could never do. Paul assured these Christians that the law was only a “shadow of things to come” and that the sacrifice of Christ became the “substance” (reality) of the things that the earlier sacrifices and religious activities could only imply or foretell (v. 17).

**Prayer Emphasis: Understand** that it is important for believers to obey God’s written commandments, but only *because* they are a Christian and not in an effort to *become* a Christian through good works. **Believe** that the Christ who died on the cross for you wants to live in and through you every day! **Realize** that the key to real *humility* is to see God as *holy*!

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| **Day 34: Colossians 3:1-8** |

*“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ” (Colossians 3:1-2)*

***“Seek Those Things Which Are Above”***

Chapter 3 helps us see that the Christian’s walk is to be based on the individual believer enjoying a right relationship with Jesus Christ. Immediately after being saved, we should begin to “seek those things which are above” (v. 1). The word “seek” implies an intentional and diligent search. Some translations use phrases like “set our hearts” in this verse. Since the Greek verb “seek” is in a tense that implies continuous action, at least one translation reads “keep seeking the things above.” Obedience to this divine command is the cure against the three dangerous actions that Paul had earlier warned these believers about. Verse 5 includes some things we should “put to death.” A careful look at those five dangerous mindsets should clearly reveal that God expects His followers to walk differently than unbelievers. However, the command to “put to death” these evil actions implies it is entirely possible for a believer, without proper training, to continue to live a sinful lifestyle. Then, verse 8 lists five things we should “put off,” or, as some translations read, “rid ourselves of”.

**Prayer Emphasis: Understand** that the word “above” does not imply simply some *higher* standard taught by man, but a true *heavenly* standard that can only be taught by the indwelling Spirit of God. **Note** that the “above” mentioned here is, “where Christ is”. And where is Jesus Christ right now? He is “sitting at the right hand of God” (v. 1)! (**See** also Acts 7:55–56; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; and Hebrews 10:12.)

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| **Day 35: Colossians 3:9-17** |

*“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another…”(Colossians 3:12-13a)*

***Some Things to “Put On”***

After telling us there are some things that every believer should “put to death” (3:5), and “put off” (3:8), Paul now tells us about some things every believer should “put on” (v. 12-14). The Greek word translated “put on” in our focus verse is the same word that is used to describe how John the Baptist “was *clothed* with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist” (Mark 1:6). As such, among the items to be included in the believer’s clothing (spiritual wardrobe) are “tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering” and “love” (vs. 12 & 14). When we are appropriately dressed, we will then be fully equipped to be “bearing with one another, and forgiving one another” (v. 13). There is to be zero tolerance for not forgiving others. The word “anyone” in that verse literally implies “everyone” and means there is no one who is the exception to this command. Some translations use the words “any one of you” or “whoever” here to help us understand this is a universal command to all believers.

**Prayer Emphasis: Dress** for success today! “**Put on**” a true Christian *attitude* toward others, and you will see how it directs your *actions* toward others! In Mark 15:20 we are told that, after those who actually crucified Jesus “mocked Him,” they “put His own clothes on Him.” It seems the Holy Spirit now desires to put “His own clothes” on us!

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| **Day 36: Colossians 3:18-4:1** |

*“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.” (Colossians 3:18-19)*

***Some Rules About Relationships***

Yesterday we saw that, when Christ is first in our lives, we will do everything possible to be “bearing with one another, and forgiving one another” (3:13). In our earthly relationships we should always be mindful of how Christ has forgiven us. As Christians, we should always deal with one another in the spirit of love. This means we should exhibit the characteristics of love (see 1 Corinthians 13) in our relationships and dealings with other people. We are to allow “the peace of God” to “rule” in our hearts (v. 15). The word “rule” in that verse is very much like our word “umpire” today. This means we should allow God’s peace to “make the call” and we should all agree to abide by what will allow God’s peace to be uninterrupted in our fellowship. To do this, we need to have God’s Word dwelling (living) in us so that we can live out our faith in our daily walk. Take a moment to notice that the characteristics of someone who is filled with the “word of Christ” (v. 16) are identical to the characteristics of someone who is “filled with the Spirit” (see Ephesians 5:18-21). But, living in Christian fellowship goes beyond just how we live and act in church. It reaches into our marriages, our parenting responsibilities, and even our relationships at work. Christians are to exhibit the characteristics of Christ in every area and aspect of their lives.

**Prayer Emphasis: Continue** reading from God’s Word every day. **Allow** God to be the “umpire” (decision maker) in all concerns, circumstances, and even contentions in your life. **Exhibit** the love of Christ in all that you say and do. **Remember**, Christians should exhibit the characteristics of Christ in all of their relationships and responsibilities.

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| **Day 37: Colossians 4:2-9** |

*“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word…for which I am also in chains” (Colossians 4:2-3)*

***Some Final Instructions***

As Paul closes this letter, he leaves his readers with some important, final instructions. First, they are to “continue earnestly in prayer” (v. 2). Some translations use the words “be devoted to prayer” to help us understand the meaning of Paul’s words to his beloved Colossians. He also encouraged them to “walk in wisdom towards those who are outside” (v. 5). This meant that they were to act wisely toward those who were outside the church, being mindful of their personal witness to them. They were also to be “redeeming the time” (v. 5). The NIV translates that to say, “Make the most of every opportunity.” He then added that their “speech” should “always be with grace” and “seasoned with salt” (v. 6). That meant they were to be knowledgeable, so they could provide correct answers to those who became enquirers about the faith. When Christians exhibit the characteristics of Christ in every aspect of their lives, people around them will begin to inquire about what they see and hear. Paul closes with some greetings and kind remarks about some fellow servants of the Lord. Notice how Paul seemed to really know these people. He expressed words of endorsement or encouragement for both “Tychicus” and “Onesimus” (vs. 7-9).

**Prayer Emphasis: Consider** what you might say if you knew you were communicating with your loved ones for a final time. **Read** again verse 3 and remember this is Paul’s first mention of his “chains” in this letter. **Remember** there are a lot of things that are more important to talk about than our problems!

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| **Day 38: Colossians 4:10-18** |

*“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received my instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him.)” (Colossians 4:10)*

***Remember “Mark”?***

As he closed this letter to the church at Colosse, Paul relayed some greetings from “Aristarchus” and “Mark the cousin of Barnabas” (v. 10), and encouraged the Colossians to “welcome” Mark if he came to visit and minister among them. This is the same “Mark” about whom Paul and Barnabas had their dispute, the story of which is recorded in Acts 15. At that time Paul refused to allow Mark to go with him on a planned missionary journey because Mark had “departed from them” early in their first journey (Acts 15:38). But now, it seems that Paul could hold to his faith a whole lot better and longer than he could hold a grudge! He asked that his letter be circulated to other churches and that these Christians read the letter that the church at Laodicea was currently reading (v. 16). Since all of Paul’s letters were to be circulated to the churches, we are not sure what letter the Laodiceans had at that time. I do not think that this verse indicates there is a “lost letter” of Paul and that we have an incomplete Bible! May we all, like Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which (we) have received from the Lord, that (we) may fulfill it” (v. 17).

**Prayer Emphasis: Note** that Paul once more mentioned his personal problem when he asked the Colossians to “remember (his) chains” (v. 18). It is worth mentioning again that Paul had many things to say to his fellow believers that he considered infinitely more important than his own troubles and woes. **Mention** something good and encouraging about one fellow believer to another today!

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| **Day 39: Philemon 1:1-11** |

*“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon….” (Philemon 1:1)*

***A Personal Letter***

This is a personal letter written by one Christian friend to another that includes no doctrinal teaching but speaks volumes on how Christians are to communicate and cooperate with one another. In this letter we get to see Paul not as the preacher, evangelist, or theologian, but as Paul the person – the man who had been radically changed by his meeting with Christ many years before. Philemon was a “beloved friend and fellow laborer” (v. 1) who was known for the “love and faith” that he had “toward the Lord Jesus” and “all the saints.” He was also known for “sharing” his “faith” and for having “good” within him (vs. 4-6). The “hearts of the saints” had often been “refreshed” by this good “brother” (v. 7). This man had a runaway slave named Onesimus who Paul had led to Christ and for whom the apostle was now interceding. We assume that Paul led Onesimus to Christ in prison while he was jailed for preaching the gospel, and the slave was imprisoned for stealing and running away from his master. (Verse 18 will later suggest that Onesimus might have “wronged” his master and now owed him whatever he might have taken from him.) Paul clearly states that he had “begotten” (led to a new birth experience) this young man “while in my chains” (verse 10).

**Prayer Emphasis:** Always **be mindful** that Christians are to appreciate one another! **Observe** the complimentary way that Paul addressed Philemon. **Avoid** being critical and condescending in the way that you speak to people. **Express** appreciation to a Christian friend today. **Note** that, although Paul was in prison in Rome, he actually considered himself to be “a prisoner of Christ Jesus” (v. 1).

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| **Day 40: Philemon 1:12-25** |

*“For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose…” (Philemon 1:15)*

***A “Romans 8:28” Experience!***

As Paul was writing this letter to Philemon, it had already been about three or four years since he had written to the Christians at Rome and reminded them that, “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). He now was expressing to Philemon how this great principle was working in not only Paul’s life, but in the lives of his friend and his runaway slave as well! Paul suggested to Philemon that “perhaps he” (Onesimus) had “departed for a while for this purpose” (v. 15) – meaning that Onesimus might have run away so that he might be captured, meet Paul, be saved, and then ultimately return to his master as a Christian brother! As such, this young man would now be “more than a slave” because he was now “a beloved brother” (v. 16). The apostle urged Philemon to receive his runaway slave as he would Paul himself and pledged to compensate his friend for any wrong or loss that Onesimus had caused him. Learning that Philemon had accepted and restored Onesimus to a place of service – both as a *slave* and a fellow *saint* – would cause Paul great “joy…in the Lord” and would “refresh” his heart (v. 20).

**Prayer Emphasis: Trust** God’s Romans 8:28 principle to work in your own life! **Believe** that God is always working with our best interest in mind! Thank you for joining us in the reading of Paul’s prison epistles. If we can minister to you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact me at [gary@seminolebc.com](mailto:gary@seminolebc.com) or at 850-562-8069.