

# Reasons for Thanksgiving and Prayer



## SABBATH—JANUARY 3

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Philippians 1:3–18; 1 Corinthians 13:1–8; Colossians 1:3–12; Colossians 1:6, 23.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “God began to do a good work in you. And I am sure that he will keep on doing it until he has finished it. He will keep on until the day Jesus Christ comes again” (Philippians 1:6, WE).

**Paul** starts his letters with words of greeting and thanksgiving. “I pray that God, our Father, will continue to help you. I pray that he will give you peace in your minds. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you” (Colossians 1:2, 3, EASY).

We, too, have much to be thankful for. We thank God for His mercy. Angels in heaven can't begin to understand our amazing experience with God's mercy. We also thank God for His gifts of peace, hope, and love.

As humans, we can show other people that we thank God for the things they do for us. We hope that they also will thank God for the things we do for them, too. Parents pray that their children will love God. Parents also pray that their children someday will thank God for their happy times with their families.

This week, we will study Paul's opening words in his letters to the churches in Philippi and in Colossae. These words are filled with thanksgiving and prayer. May these words make our own prayer life strong.



**Angels in heaven can't begin to understand our amazing experience with God's mercy.**

**FELLOWSHIP IN THE CHURCH (Philippians 1:3–8)**

**Read Philippians 1:3–8. Then answer the following questions. What does Paul thank God for? What does Paul say to the Christians in Philippi to give them hope? Why are Paul’s words so important for us today?**

Paul is in jail. Hundreds of miles separate Paul from the Christians at Philippi. But Paul continues to care for them deeply. Paul started the church in Philippi. So, Paul’s heart is filled with love for the Christians there. That’s why he tells them, “God knows that I very much want to be with all of you. I love you very much, just like [the same as] Christ Jesus himself loves you” (Philippians 1:8, EASY). Paul thanks God for them. Paul’s thanksgiving prayer helps us to understand Jesus’ work for us in heaven. Jesus is our high priest. A high priest is a top religious leader.

In Bible times, the high priest wore a chest covering. On this chest covering were 12 stones. There was one stone for each name of the 12 family groups in Israel. So, when the high priest wore the chest covering, that was the same as wearing their names “on his heart” (Exodus 28:29, CEV). Then he went to God to get help for them. As our high priest, Jesus also carries the names of His people in His heart. Then He goes to the Father to get help for us, too.

In Philippians 1:3, Paul says, “Every time I think of you I thank God for you” (WE). This verse shows us the close fellowship that Paul enjoyed with the Philippian Christians. Paul suffered with Jesus (Philippians 3:10). In the same way, the Philippians suffered with Paul. The Philippians also supported Paul’s work for God (Philippians 4:14, 15). The Philippians “helped [Paul] from the first day you believed until now” (Philippians 1:5, ERV). That’s why Paul thanks God for them. Paul prays “with joy” for them (Philippians 1:4, ERV).

Paul doesn’t feel sad for himself in jail. Paul talks about his time in jail as a time to praise God. While Paul is in jail, he shares the Good News about Jesus. Paul also proves that the Good News is Bible truth. Paul will soon go to court. But Paul cares more about saving the soldiers and visitors to the jail than he cares about getting out of jail. Paul isn’t worried if he will live or die. Paul believes that God will finish the “good work” that He started in everyone who trusts in Him (Philippians 1:6, ERV).



**As our high priest, Jesus also carries the names of His people in His heart.**

## PAUL'S PRAYER (Philippians 1:9–11)

**Read Paul's prayer in Philippians 1:9–11. What does Paul pray about? What big things does he ask God for? What do your answers tell you about prayer?**



**Paul prays for love, knowledge, understanding, honesty, a clean and innocent heart, and for help to live a holy life.**

Paul's prayer is 43 words long in the Greek language. But in this small number of words, Paul tells us all of his wishes and needs. Paul prays for love, knowledge, understanding, honesty, a clean and innocent heart, and for help to live a holy life. Paul's prayer is not about himself. He prays for the whole church and for its success. Let's look more closely at some of the things Paul prays for:

- 1. Love.** Paul doesn't just pray for the church to love more. He prays for the church to share their love and wise words. Paul wants the church to have God's Spirit. We can get God's Spirit only from fellowship with God. We also learn about God from Bible study (read Ephesians 1:17; Ephesians 4:13; and 1 Timothy 2:4).
- 2. Wise words.** When we grow our love and share our wise words with others, we will have the skill to know right from wrong. When we choose what is right, we will have holy hearts and clean minds (Philippians 1:10).
- 3. Telling the truth.** In the Greek language, the word for telling the truth means "judged with the sunlight." This symbol helps us see that our behavior must be holy. "Everything that Christians do should be as clear as the sunlight."—Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, page 71. What does this quote really mean? We shouldn't be sneaky or do anything in secret. Our lives and behavior should be open and honest. So, we shouldn't say one thing in private and then do something else in public. Our private lives must match our public lives.
- 4. A clean and innocent heart.** We must not say or do anything that will make it hard for someone else to believe in Jesus.
- 5. The power to live a holy life.** We can't live holy lives without Jesus. Paul talks more about this idea in his letters to the Romans and to the Galatians. Paul also talks about this idea in Philippians 3.

**How can our love "grow more and more" until Jesus comes (Philippians 1:9, ERV)? Why is this Bible truth important for the Christian life (read 1 Corinthians 13:1–8)?**

**SPIRITUAL LOVE AND WISE WORDS  
(Philippians 1:12–18)**

The Philippians were upset when they heard that Paul was in jail. We can understand why this news upset them. Now Paul could not work the same as he used to. He could not travel or preach anymore. He stopped visiting the Jewish churches to teach the people that Jesus was the Savior. Paul no longer started churches. The Philippians sent Epaphroditus to check on Paul and to encourage him.

**How did Paul feel about being in jail? What lessons can we learn from his thoughts and feelings about his experience? Read Philippians 1:12–18 for the answers.**

The message Paul sent back to the Philippians must have surprised them. Paul's spiritual understanding helped him to see his time in jail as a gift from God. Prison didn't stop Paul's work at all. That's why Paul says, "The trouble that has happened to me has helped more people to know about God's good news" (Philippians 1:12, EASY). Paul saw his Roman guards as possible members for God's kingdom. Paul understood that his time in jail helped other people to work harder for the Lord.

Sad to say, some church leaders thought they could become more popular and powerful now that Paul was in jail. With Paul out of the way, these leaders thought that the people would pay more attention to their own preaching. Their selfish example is so sad. Worse, these people belonged to the church! Long before Paul, Jeremiah warned us, " 'The heart is fooled [tricked] more than anything else, and is very sinful [filled with evil]. Who can know how bad it [the heart] is?' " (Jeremiah 17:9, NLV).

Not everyone was so evil. Some Christians worked harder for the Lord. These workers loved Paul so much that his suffering for his faith caused them to trust Jesus more. Because of Paul, these workers went where they were afraid to go before. In the past, they were afraid to speak or preach. But now they no longer felt afraid. Because of these brave workers, more people accepted Jesus and the Good News.

**What are some bad experiences in your past that made your faith strong? How else did these experiences help you grow? How did they help you trust God more?**



**Paul saw his Roman guards as possible members for God's kingdom.**



**GOD’S WORK IN THE HEART (Colossians 1:3–8)**

Paul’s relationship with the Colossians was different from his relationship with the Philippian Christians. Paul included the Colossians in the group of people who haven’t “met me in person” (Colossians 2:1, NIV). Paul tells the Colossians that he thanks God for them, the same as the Philipians. Paul is always praying for the Colossians.

**What three things does Paul thank God for? Read Colossians 1:3–8 for the answer.**



**The Roman roads made travel and communication easy and fast.**

Paul talks about three holy behaviors: faith, hope, and love. Paul talks about these three things in his other letters, too (read 1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; and 1 Thessalonians 5:8). Do you see that Paul doesn’t praise the Colossians for these three things? Paul thanks His Father in heaven for them. These three gifts come from Him. James says, “Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God” (James 1:17, NIV). When we see God’s love for us, we will have faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:4–8). When we believe in Jesus, God fills our hearts with the hope of heaven. Peter says this hope is one of “the blessings God has for his children. These blessings are kept for you in heaven. They cannot be destroyed or be spoiled or lose their beauty” (1 Peter 1:4, ICB).

Paul also says that we can trust the Good News. That’s because the Good News comes from the Bible. The Bible is God’s Word to us (read 2 Corinthians 6:7 and 2 Timothy 2:15). The Bible works in the lives of people who believe in it (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Lord tells us, “My word does what I want it to do. What I promise to do will certainly happen” (Isaiah 55:11, EASY). When Jesus’ followers preach the Good News, the Holy Spirit touches their hearts. Then people’s lives change for the better. That’s because the Good News is “the true message that can give them life with God” (Philippians 2:16, EASY).

The Good News went to many places in a very short time. About 30 years after Jesus’ death, Paul said that the Good News was “told to everyone on earth” (Colossians 1:23, ERV). The Roman roads made travel and communication easy and fast. But the real reason for the success of the Good News is the power of God’s love. God’s love works with the Good News to give us new spiritual life (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

## PRAYER POWER (Colossians 1:9–12)

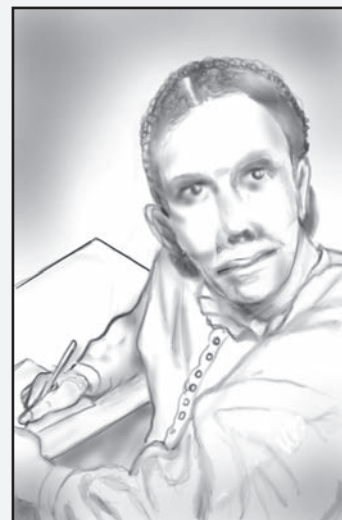
**Read Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9–12. What does Paul ask God to do for the Colossians?**

Paul prays that “God will make you completely sure of what he wants” (Colossians 1:9, ERV). Paul asks God to give the Colossian church the “wisdom and spiritual understanding” to know God’s plan. Wisdom comes from fully trusting God. We also must be willing to do what God wants (John 7:17). We must not depend on what we know (Proverbs 3:5). People often ask, “What is God’s plan for me?” We may learn God’s plan for our lives from four important things:

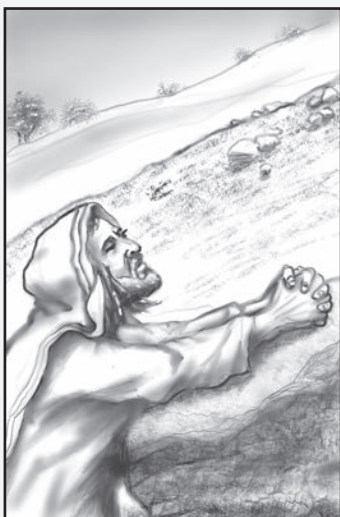
- 1. The Bible.** The Bible is the most important gift of wisdom that God gave us. So, we must start with the Bible to learn God’s plan for our lives.
- 2. The Writings of Ellen G. White.** God also gave the Seventh-day Adventist Church the writings of Ellen G. White. Her writings are filled with wisdom for God’s people in the end times. As King Jehoshaphat tells Israel, “ ‘Trust in the LORD your God. Then you will be safe. Believe the message that his prophets [special messengers] have spoken. Then you will win the battle’ ” (2 Chronicles 20:20, EASY).
- 3. God-given experiences.** We can ask God to make things happen or to stop them from happening (Colossians 4:3).
- 4. The Holy Spirit.** When we know the Holy Spirit’s voice, He will lead us. “If you wander from the right path, either to the right or to the left, you will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘You should go this way. Here is the right way’ ” (Isaiah 30:21, ERV).

Paul prays that the lives of the Colossians “will please the Lord” (Colossians 1:10, NLV). Of course, no one can please God without His help. But God gives us mercy. He commands us to live worthy of Him (Ephesians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:12). As Paul says, we must continue to live in Jesus (Colossians 2:6; Colossians 3:7; Colossians 4:5). To do that, we must follow God’s law (Exodus 18:20). We can succeed only with the Spirit’s help (Ezekiel 36:27).

Paul prays that the lives of the Colossians (and also our lives) will please God in every way. Then Paul tells us how to do that: (1) “Do every kind [type] of good work, and (2) you will know more about God” (Colossians 1:10, NLV, read also Colossians 1:9). Finally, (3) we should “joyfully give thanks to the Father” (Colossians 1:12, ICB).



**Ellen G. White's writings are filled with wisdom for God's people in the end times.**



**“Each day, the Father showed Jesus His plans.”**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** “Many people have trouble planning for the future. Their lives are not certain. They can’t tell how things will end. So, their hearts are often filled with fear. They don’t have peace. Let’s remember this Bible truth: this earth is not our home. We don’t have wisdom to plan our own lives. That’s not our job. ‘God called [commanded] Abraham to travel to another place that he promised to give him. Abraham did not know where that other place was. But he obeyed God and started traveling because he had faith.’ Hebrews 11:8 [ERV].

“Jesus made no plans for Himself when He lived on this earth. He accepted God’s plans for Him. Each day, the Father showed Jesus His plans. We must depend on God in the same way. Then our lives will follow His plan. He will tell us what to do and where to go.

“Too many people try to plan for their future. But their plans fail. Let God plan for you. Be the same as a little child in your heart. Trust God to guide you. ‘He protects his holy people. He keeps them from stumbling [tripping and going in the wrong direction].’ 1 Samuel 2:9 [ERV]. God always leads His children in a way that they would choose to be led if they could see the future. Then they would understand God’s beautiful plan. They would know that they are working together with God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pages 478, 479, adapted.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Make a list of things you thank God for. Do you have many more reasons to thank God than you think?
- ② Think about the ending of the quote above. How can you learn to trust God in this deep way?
- ③ Read Colossians 1:6, 23. Then talk about this quote: “For 40 years, ancient Israel couldn’t enter the Promised Land. Their sins kept them out. The Israelites fought against God. They doubted Him and complained. The same sins have kept modern Israel out of heaven for so many years. The problem isn’t God’s fault. If God’s church did her work, everyone on this earth would have been warned before this time. Then Jesus would have come back to our earth in power and glory.”—Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, page 38, adapted. In what ways are we guilty of the same sins today?

## A MESSENGER FROM GOD

Oscar stood still and prayed as three dogs barked at him outside a house in Kenya. The owner let the dogs out when he saw Oscar approach the house. The owner came over to Oscar. The man asked, "Who are you?"

Oscar said, "I'm a messenger from God."

The man asked, "What message did God send you with?"

Oscar said, "His message. May I come in?"

The man ordered the dogs to stop barking and tied them up. Then the man invited Oscar into his house.

Oscar said, "Let's pray." The man didn't close his eyes. Oscar prayed. Then he started to talk about the first five books of Moses, named the Pentateuch. The man wasn't a Christian. He belonged to a non-Christian worldwide religion. But the man knew those books of the law. The man asked many questions. The two men became friends. Today, the man and his wife are Seventh-day Adventists.

Another time, a homeowner told Oscar he was interested in the Bible lessons that Oscar offered. The man sent his three children into the other room to play. The children were ages 6, 8, and 13. As they left the room, Oscar saw that they limped with pain. Oscar said, "Ask the children to come back, so we can pray for them." Then Oscar saw that the children had tiny insects crawling on their skin. These insects cause terrible skin rashes and pain. Oscar prayed for the children. Then he left to buy medicine.

The family thought that evil magic was making their children sick, and not the insects. When Oscar came back, he helped the family clean their house and blankets. Then he told the parents to bathe the children and give them the medicine. Oscar prayed for them. Then Oscar studied the Bible with the parents. Later, the family became Seventh-day Adventist. They sold some of their land to build a new Seventh-day Adventist church.

Oscar also visits Sunday-keeping churches to share the Good News about Jesus. A Sunday-church leader invited Oscar to preach in his church. But when the leader learned that Oscar was Seventh-day Adventist, the man refused to allow Oscar to preach. Oscar stayed for the meeting anyway. As he left, he saw many of his neighbors. He went to greet them.

Oscar said, "Do not wait for the pastor to come teach you. I have lessons you can study yourself."

7 people accepted the Bible lessons right away. A few people didn't. But later on, they agreed to study the lessons. Today, 43 people from the Sunday church are studying the Bible with Oscar. Oscar says, "Not bad for a meeting where I wasn't allowed to preach!"

INSIDE  
*Story*



**Oscar stood still and prayed as three dogs barked at him outside a house in Kenya.**