## Reflections 13-19 July – Encouraging words

Colossians 1: 1-14

## Begin with an opening prayer

Lord, help us know what it is we are called to do
and help us listen and act.
As we gather today, may we hear your
encouragement and share it with others.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.

**1**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, **2**To God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29468a)] in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29468b)]

### Thanksgiving and Prayer

**3**We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, **4**because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people— **5**the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel **6**that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace. **7**You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29473c)] who is a faithful minister of Christ on our[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29473d)] behalf, **8**and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

**9**For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29475e)] **10**so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, **11**being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, **12**and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29478f)] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. **13**For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, **14**in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

## **Explore and respond to the text**

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

**Bible notes**

Paul wrote one of his most theologically rich and philosophically well-informed letters to a place that was not really on anyone’s map, the city of Colossae. When it was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 64 no one bothered to rebuild it, preferring to move down the road to other more important cities. The city might not have mattered to Caesar but it mattered to God, and Paul writes encouraging the new Jesus followers in the city to stand firm in their faith and support for one another.

In the contemporary world, spirituality is often individualistic – my inner peace; my private walk with God. For Paul, however, it is a gift from God (v.2), that comes through others, like Epaphras (v.7) who spends his life serving the needs of others. All the verbs and the ‘yous’ in this opening section are plural; truly we are all in this together.

And so, in this world of everyone for themselves cut-throat competition, we learn to be human from each other as God works in the community of the church. Paul’s focus is on ‘love’ (vv.4 and 5), and fruit and good works (v.10). As we do good, we get to know God better – he meets and blesses us as we do this, so we grow not by living for ourselves in splendid isolation but for God and others in a community of love and mutual encouragement – the polar opposite of the rugged individualism promoted by both Rome and our world.

Because we are not self-made, God has given us life with one another in his kingdom, so we can live open-handed lives, sharing responsibility for one another and ensuring everyone’s needs are met. Basil of Caesarea, a fourth-century bishop, said: ‘When someone steals a person’s clothes, we call him a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to those who need it; the shoes rotting in your closet to the one who has no shoes. The money which you hoard belongs to the poor.’

This way of living is not easy or popular, but it is evidence of grace and is possible for those who belong to a community of love.

**Reflection**

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

The world in which we live has a story about how things work and what we should believe if we want to get on. You could call this ‘the spirit of the age’, and every age has one. As Paul penned this short letter to Christians in Colossae, he was aware that he wrote against the backdrop of a powerful story of empire told by Caesar and his legions, and further reinforced by artists, poets, philosophers and local politicians; a story that has echoes in our world.

Reflect on how these words of Paul can both challenge the stories our culture tells us and inform us of God’s counter-story that will open the doorway to the good life for us and our community.

### **Questions for reflection**

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.



**Questions**

* What’s the most encouraging thing anyone has ever said to you?
* Which areas in your life do you need to feel encouraged in right now?
* How can you encourage others with your words?

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

As we go out in the world today,
help us to treasure the encouraging words we have heard.
May our mouths be full of encouraging words for others.
Help us to look out for opportunities to share them this week.
**Amen.**