

*HOW SHALL WE PRAY? — A PRAYER FOR THE FUTURE
COLOSSIANS 1:9-12*

We have remembered our church's past. And we have remembered God's faithfulness in our past.

We have given thanks to God for His care for us over the past 40 years. Now what? As we said last Sunday, by the grace of God, we do not believe we are finished with the task God has given us. There is worship to be offered, evangelism to be practiced, discipleship to be done, physical help to be given, fellowship to be enjoyed, and Scripture to be taught. We are a long way from finished.

So what is our task for the days ahead? What should consume us? What are our priorities? And do our priorities change since we have passed some kind of milestone of ministry?

Last Sunday, Pastor Keith served us well by reminding us of the priority of prayer — that in days ahead we must be people of prayer who express our dependence on God and trust in God through prayer. That perspective fits perfectly with what I had already planned to do for our worship today — to remind us of Paul's prayer for the Colossians, which compels us to do two things: his prayer reminds us of the priority of prayer and his prayer informs us how to pray for one another, and how to focus our lives in the days ahead. His prayer teaches us what is essential for our lives and ministry for the days ahead.

In Paul's prayer in Colossians 1 we discover that what we pray compels how we work in the church body —

WE PRAY (AND WORK) FOR A CHURCH THAT IS PLEASING TO THE LORD.

These verses instruct us not only how to pray, but also instruct us about the kind of life we are to pursue. We will pray and work for six attributes that please the Lord:

1. We Will Pray (and Work) for Spiritual **FILLING** (v. 9)
2. We Will Pray (and Work) for Worthy **LIVES** (v. 10a)
3. We Will Pray (and Work) for Spiritual **FRUITFULNESS** (v. 10b)
4. We Will Pray (and Work) to Know **GOD** (v. 10c)
5. We Will Pray (and Work) for Strength to **ENDURE** (v. 11)
6. We Will Pray (and Work) for Hearts of **GRATITUDE** (v. 12)

1. We Will Pray (and Work) for Spiritual FILLING (v. 9)

- As Paul begins transitions from thanksgiving (vv. 3-8) to prayer, notice he uses two terms for prayer:
 - ✓ The word **pray** is the most general word for prayer in the NT. It is an expression of dependence on God, but what is most significant is that the prayer is regular and ongoing, which he stresses by the present tense of the verb as well as affirming, **we have not ceased**. Paul continued in prayer (for these people he'd never met) and did not stop even when he might not have heard from them.
 - ✓ The word **ask** is a more specific term than “pray” — it focuses on the particular requests and emphasizes going to a superior person and eliciting help; it is a humble term of submission.
 - ✓ Notice that Paul's prayer is also motivated by what he had heard about the Colossian church — **For this reason also, since the day we heard of it...** That is, the reason that he is praying is that he had heard of their faith (v. 4). He was motivated to pray for them because of their faith — that is, he wanted them to continue in their faith (there was no urgent, emergency need for prayer — he simply wants them to stay true to the faith, which is a good motive for our own prayers).
 - ✓ It is also not stated explicitly but seems clear that when Paul prays something, he is also committed to pursuing and doing that very thing. When he asks for something, he also is committed to orienting his life around that request. He will do what he asks.
- The first request of Paul might also be the broadest and all-encompassing request — **be filled with the knowledge of His will**.
 - ✓ The word **fill** is used commonly by Paul and in this letter; perhaps his use of the term in 2:10 is most significant to here: Just as Christ is fully God, even while He was in the form of a man, so also has He, through the cross, made us complete (**full**) in Him. From God's perspective, there is nothing lacking in us, so, here the desire of Paul is that these believers would come to experience the same kind of fullness in their spiritual living — that they would experience the fullness of what they are.
 - ✓ Specifically, Paul wants them to be under the control and domination of **God's will** — that they would know and be obedient to God's revealed moral will. That knowledge is found in Christ and Christ's Word: 2:3; also cf. 1:28; 2:8, 23; 3:10; 3:16; 4:5. To know God's Word is to know God's will.
 - ✓ This knowledge of God's will is received by **spiritual understanding and wisdom**. That is wisdom (the art of living rightly and well) and understanding (the application of wisdom to particular circumstances of life) are spiritually derived — they come from the Spirit of God. The believer is made alive by the Spirit and then the Spirit guides His entire life (cf. Eph. 5:18). And to live in spiritual wisdom and understanding is in contrast to having a fleshly mind (cf. 2:18).

- As we think about church life after 40 years of ministry, we are still focused on this:
 - ✓ We want to persevere in prayer for one another — and even for those whom we have not yet met (e.g., all those churches overseas we support through our missionaries).
 - ✓ We are committed to helping people know the reality of what they are in Christ, what Christ says (which means teaching Scripture) and how they can obey Him (which is also one of the themes of Romans — cf. **Rom. 1:5; 16:26**).
 - ✓ Whatever else we do in ministry, it is going to be Bible-focused (God’s wisdom) and Spirit-empowered (God’s means). We aren’t interested in being motivational or man-centered. We want only what God can do through His Spirit and the Spirit’s primary tool, Scripture.
 - ✓ There really isn’t a new model of ministry. Ministry is, and always has been, about unfolding and relating the Scriptures to life (e.g., **Dt. 6:5-7**; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; **2 Tim. 4:2**).

2. We Will Pray (and Work) for Worthy LIVES (v. 10a)

- A second primary component of Paul’s prayer is that the Colossians would **walk in a manner worthy of the Lord**. When he says “walk,” he simply means “live life.” The believer’s life should be lived in a particular manner. In other places, this term is used of living in humility, purity, contentedness, by faith, different from the world, in good works, in love, in light, in wisdom, and in truth.
 - ✓ Here Paul uses an all-encompassing term — **worthy of the Lord**. To be “worthy” of the Lord suggests that our lives are in opposing scales and they are balanced; they are equitable.
 - ✓ This doesn’t mean that the believer merits his salvation, but it does mean that his life corresponds to and is consistent with Christ.
 - ✓ We find similar exhortations in places like 1 Pt. 1:15 when we are called to be holy, as He is holy; or 2 Cor. 5:20, when we are called His ambassadors and representatives. Or **Eph. 4:1-3**, where our worthiness is expressed by our unity with one another. Or **Col. 1:18b**; **Rom. 8:28** — we are conformed to the image of Christ to look and behave like Him.
 - ✓ One commentator says of the life worthy of Christ, “There is nothing half-hearted about this manner of life.” [Hendriksen] It takes work and endurance.
 - ✓ Paul further explains what he means with a worthy life when he says the goal is **to please Him in all respects** — in every area of life, we want to be pleasing to Christ.
 - ✓ We want to please Christ more than we want to please anyone else (Gal. 1:10; **2 Cor. 5:9, 15**). That is our heavenly and eternal ambition; it is also our ambition on earth.
- When we talk about living a life worthy of Christ, we are talking about a transformed life. We are talking about sanctification and growth *in* Christ and *towards* Christ.

- ✓ The natural temptation is always to please men rather than God. We are praying for and helping one another find ways to please God more than man. Our attempts to please man are always subservient to our need to please God and be conformed to Christ.
 - ✓ In every circumstance, in every relationship, in every duty, in every difficulty, in every joy, we are duty-bound by His love for us to please Him. In all things. At all times. And pleasing Him doesn't just honor God and give Him pleasure. Pleasing Him is also our joy.
 - ✓ You will *never* (ultimately) regret any pursuit to please God.
 - ✓ You will *always* (ultimately) regret any failure to pursue pleasing God.
- As we think about church life after 40 years of ministry,
 - ✓ It is possible to accomplish things “in the name of Christ” without being worthy of Christ. Consider Jesus’ words in **Mt. 7:21-23**. Or consider what Jesus says of the Ephesian church — **Rev. 2:2-4**. Even believers can do things *for* Christ that don't ultimately exalt Christ. We want lives worthy of Christ. So our work will always focus on helping believers grow in sanctification.
 - ✓ We don't want ministries that entertain observers; we want ministries that evangelize unbelievers and transform believers.
 - That means we will be clear with the gospel and how it saves (it's by faith).
 - That means we will be clear with the gospel and how it sanctifies (it's by faith; **Gal. 3:3**).

3. We Will Pray (and Work) for Spiritual **FRUITFULNESS** (v. 10b)

- Following his prayer for worthy lives, Paul uses four participles to indicate the kinds of living that are worthy of Christ. Those four terms are the final four items for which we pray and work.
- One aspect of living worthy of Christ is ***bearing fruit in every good work***.
 - ✓ Here fruit-bearing is a present tense, so it is a constant activity, something we are always pursuing.
 - ✓ What does he mean by bearing fruit? He tells us — bearing fruit includes those things we do when we do good works. He doesn't mean that we merit salvation by our good works, but that we demonstrate our salvation *in* our good works. Life in Christ produces living for Christ. We live out the reality of what we are in Christ; we are saved to bear fruit (**Rom. 7:4-5**; Jn. 2:18ff).
 - ✓ This was the testimony of the Colossians (**v. 6**) and it was Paul's prayer for still more (**v. 10**).
 - ✓ A Christian “is nothing, if not a fruit-bearer.” [Moule]
- What kinds of fruit does Paul have in mind? *Every* kind of good, honorable activity and deed:
 - ✓ Converts to Christ (evangelism; Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 16:15)
 - ✓ A transformed and changed life from sin (Jn. 15:8; Mt. 3:8-10)

- ✓ Praise of God — the “fruit” of our lips (Heb. 13:15)
 - ✓ Financial care of others (Rom. 15:26-28)
 - ✓ Godly, righteous living (Phil. 1:11; Heb. 12:11)
 - ✓ Spirit-produced, God-like attributes and actions (Gal. 5:22-23)
 - ✓ Fruit-bearing can take place in **whatever** we do (Col. 3:17)
- As we think about church life after 40 years of ministry, we want to help people produce genuine fruit.
 - ✓ There are counterfeit and false believers (Mt. 13:1-9; 1 Jn. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:10). We want to help each other bear fruit that is consistent with Christ.
 - ✓ That means that we are willing and committed to graciously expose sin in each other’s lives so that we produce real, God-like, Spirit-produced quality of life. Exposure of sin is the first step in eradicating the sin so that we can be transformed (Js. 5:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:25-26). There is no escape from Satan’s snare until the sin is exposed and repented. When it is repented, it can be changed.
 - ✓ When people visit, they often have one dominant comment, “There is such a spirit of love, fellowship, friendliness...” It is interesting that another frequent comment is, “You don’t seem to be afraid to call a sin, ‘sin.’” That’s correct. We aren’t. And isn’t it interesting that in the place where we are unafraid to address sin, we also can do it with such grace that the one who has sinned feels loved? That’s exactly the way it should be. And that is our commitment to help people bear fruit.
 - ✓ One of my manifestations of pride is that I tend towards defensiveness, which is not helpful when someone wants to help me. Yet, I have often said of Raye Jeanne that she has found a way to say some very hard things to me about my actions, conduct, attitudes without provoking me to defensiveness. How can she do that? In part wisdom. And in part, I know that everything she says is in the context of love and that no matter what she says about me, she is committed to me and is with me to walk with me through whatever hardship my sin brings. And that is exactly the kind of way that we will help one another bear fruit — expose sin lovingly to continue to serve together.

4. We Will Pray (and Work) to Know GOD (v. 10c)

- The worthy life is one also that is **increasing in the knowledge of God**.
 - ✓ Paul’s is saying that the way fruit-bearing and sanctification happen is *through* (by means of) knowing God. When we know God, we will grow in sanctification.
 - ✓ This is what Solomon said in Prov. 1:7; 9:10 and Paul affirmed in Phil. 3:10-11.
 - ✓ There is a direct connection between our knowledge of God and our growth in Christlikeness.
 - ✓ Richard Baxter: “You must needs know that to enjoy God and His Christ is eternal life; and the soul’s enjoying is in knowing.” [*The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*]

- What is amazing about this statement is that unredeemed man cannot know God (Jn. 14:17) and even believers cannot know God fully. Yet God has revealed Himself so that something of Him can be known by the believer so we can have eternal joy and confidence in that knowledge (1 Jn. 2:3, 13-14; 5:20).
 - ✓ “There is no knowledge attainable by man so vital as the knowledge of his God. To know Him with whom we have to do is the most important thing in human life.” [George Morrison]
 - ✓ This knowledge of God is essential because “an unknown God can neither be trusted, served, nor worshipped.” [A.W. Pink] Everything in our lives is dependent on the true knowledge of God.

“We are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who runs it. The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place, and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do not know about God. Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.” [Packer]

- As we think about church life after 40 years of ministry, we are going to help people know God.
 - ✓ This means that we are going to be vigilant to defend the truth. We *are* the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). We are committed to speaking the things that are sound doctrine (Tt. 2:1). So when we see falsehood (in the world, or in the church), we will be clear to teach the truth so that you can know God. We want you to worship the One, true God, not idols that have been fashioned by hands and will totter if they aren’t nailed to the floor (Is. 40:19-20).
 - ✓ This also means that we are committed to pointing you to good resources to help you know God and be obedient to Him. We want you to know all that we can know about God so that you delight in Him above all things. We want you to want and delight in Him.

5. We Will Pray (and Work) for Strength to ENDURE (v. 11)

- Living worthy of Christ also includes being ***strengthened with all power...***
 - ✓ With the knowledge of God also comes the power of God. God strengthens us to do everything He calls us to do; He enables every responsibility and command. Cf. Eph. 1:19.
 - ✓ God doesn’t just give “some” power, but He gives us strength ***according to His glorious might***. That is, He doesn’t give *from* His strength, but He gives *in proportion to* His strength. Which means that as the limitless God of the universe, we have an infinite measure of power at our disposal.
 - ✓ The goal of this power is that it is ***for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience***:
 - It is for every kind of steadfastness — for persevering through and bearing up under the load of every kind of problem (2 Cor. 6:4; Rom. 5:3) — what we commonly call “endurance.”
 - It is for every kind of patience — for “suffering long” with every kind of person (2 Tim. 2:24).

- There has been much talk on the internet recently about apostasy because of the departure of several prominent people from Christ (Harrises and Sampson [musician]) — open rejection of Christ.
 - ✓ It is tempting to give up and quit on Christ (read Hebrews). Cultural pressures are weighty. While we may not face prison or physical persecution in the next 5-10 years, there are other kinds of suffering that will make us outcasts, mocked, spat upon, criticized, and more.
 - ✓ And in America, where we love our freedom and we love to be loved, I wonder what the impact of that will be on the church. The temptation for many will be to say:
 - “It’s too hard to battle against temptation; I give up.” (e.g., Demas)
 - “It’s too hard to be the only person remaining; I give up.” (e.g., Elijah)
 - “It’s too hard to be the outcast and discriminated against; I give up.” (e.g., Hebrews)
 - “It’s too hard to suffer physically the way I have; God doesn’t care about me so I don’t care about Him, either. I give up.” (Job’s wife and friends)
 - ✓ The power of God has been given to us to endure in all these situations.

- As we think about church life after 40 years of ministry, we are committed to helping one another endure. We are committed to be with one another in hardship:
 - ✓ We are committed to help one another with the hardships of life — illnesses that debilitate and incapacitate, and sins that tempt one to go away from Christ. We are with people for the long and hard things in life, not just the easy and short. This is when cancers come back, and cars break with not enough money left in the month, and jobs are lost, and classes are failed. “I’m with you.”
 - ✓ We are committed to help one another with the hardships of relationships — the kinds of circumstances that tempt us to be impatient and quit on each other. We are committed to restoring relationships through confession and forgiveness. We won’t quit. Many years ago while counseling a particularly difficult couple, after about 15-18 sessions the observer (not GBC member) asked me, “*Why* do you keep on going with them? It’s *hopeless!*” I said: “Because they are coming and Christ is not hopeless. As long as they come there is an opportunity for repentance.” “Well I quit...”
 - ✓ God has designed the church body in such a way that we are with each other and for each other in every circumstance. We won’t quit on each other and we will do everything we can to help each other not quit on Christ.

6. We Will Pray (and Work) for Hearts of **GRATITUDE** (v. 12)

- Finally, living worthy of Christ also means ***joyously giving thanks to the Father...***
 - ✓ This is how Paul began the chapter — with a recitation of reasons for gratitude (vv. 3-8).

- ✓ Since we talked at length about that last week, we won't belabor the same truths, but simply note:
 - In v. 3, he says the object of thanks is **to God**; here Paul says it is **to the Father**. They are one in the same; God and the Father refer to the same deity. But Paul is reminding us that the God who is in Heaven is not distant and aloof, but intimately acquainted with and connected to us. He treats us for what we are — His beloved children. He can *only* love us, if we are His. Whatever your struggle, if you are a Christian, don't lose sight of the truth that He is your Father.
 - While Paul has exemplified thankfulness, he also prays that the Colossians will be thankful, which is a reminder that gratitude is a supernatural, not natural response to God. There is a sense that gratitude to God is also a gift from God. And if we will be thankful it will be because we are faithful to pursue and work at appropriating the gift of gratitude He gives us.
 - The focus of the gratitude in this verse is directed to the Person who has **qualified us to share in the inheritance...** The focus of gratitude is on the gift of grace that redeems us from sin and gives us everything we need both now and for eternity. He has given us an eternal inheritance (e.g., **Phil. 3:20**; Acts 26:18; Gal. 3:29).
- As we think about church life after 40 years of ministry, we will intentionally cultivate gratitude.
 - ✓ We are committed to corporately stimulating gratitude (worship and prayer).
 - ✓ We are committed to personally helping each other be thankful (praying over thank lists).

CONCLUSION: If we say we will pray, then we must pray now. It is not only fitting to pray, but we are compelled by this passage to pray. And as we pray, we also affirm that we are not only asking God to do this in us, but that we are also willing, under the power of the Spirit and Word to also pursue these things:

Our Father, we bow before you in humility and dependence. We need you to save us; we need you to transform us and guide us if we will be of any service to you. We affirm our agreement with Paul and You about the priorities of what we should pray and do from this passage. As we think about the ministry of the church in the years ahead and about our own lives we ask for these things:

Will You fill us with Your Spirit? Will you use your Spirit in our lives to give us a knowledge of Your will? We want to know what is required of us and available to us, so will you use the Spirit to guide us as we read and study Your Word so that we can know it and obey it? And would you use the Spirit to give us insight for all wisdom and the particular application of that wisdom to our own lives? *As we ask for Your Spirit*, we also affirm our commitment to submit to the authority of the Spirit and the Word and to let them control us.

Will You compel us to live lives that are worthy of You and our Savior, Jesus? We want to be transformed so that our lives conform to our Savior's life. We desire to live in concert with Christ. We want to look like Christ. Would you sanctify us increasingly so that we live Christ-honorable lives? *As we ask for worthy lives*, we also affirm our commitment, by the Spirit, to live worthy of You.

Will You produce spiritual fruit in us? Would you give us fruit as evangelists, disciplers, worshippers, and as discipliners? Would you help us to deal with sin in our own lives and then grace to love and help those who are weak with sin in their lives so they can be freed from Satan's deception? *As we ask for fruit*, we also affirm our commitment, by the Spirit, to pursue godly fruit and forsake worldly idols and pleasures.

Will You give us a deepening knowledge of You? We want to know about You and we want to know You. We want to be consumed with You, feasting on You, satisfied with You, guardians of the truth and protected from falsehood and error. Would you give us wisdom to protect Your truth and know You through Your truth? *As we ask to know You*, we also affirm our commitment, by the Spirit, to pursue You and a knowledge and intimacy with You.

Will You give us strength to endure? The world is enticing us to leave You for many reasons. Would you embolden us and strengthen us and keep us? Would you keep us from failing and making a mockery of our lives and leading others go mock Christ? *As we ask for strength*, we also affirm our commitment, by the Spirit, to live worthy of You by appropriating the strength You have given us.

Will You give us hearts of gratitude? We are tempted to be discontent with what we don't have on earth; make us content with the riches of what we have in Heaven. Help us to see the grace and goodness of Christ and help us be thankful for all things in all circumstances. *As we ask for gratitude*, we also affirm our commitment, by the Spirit, to cultivate thankfulness and flee from ingratitude and self-absorption.

BENEDICTION:

Now go into the world in peace.

Have courage.

Hold onto what is good.

Honor all men.

Strengthen the faint-hearted.

Support the weak.

Help the suffering.

Share the gospel.

Love and serve the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.