

"A New Year's Prayer" - Colossians 1

I have some questions for you. First, if you could get anybody in the world, living or dead, to pray for you, who would it be? I think a lot of folks would say their mother. There is something powerful about a mama's prayers.

My next question is, for what would you ask that person to pray? But before you answer that question, I want to ask you another question. And that is, what is your goal in life? What is your purpose? What is the end game, the reason for you to be living? I ask that because I believe that will directly affect what you are praying for.

If your goal in life is to be comfortable, then by all means pray for health and wealth. And there is nothing wrong with praying for health or wealth. We have a biblical mandate to pray for others and ourselves when we are sick or hurting physically. Nothing wrong with praying for that. And I don't believe there is anything wrong with praying for your wealth. When you pray, *"Lord, please help me to be able to pay the rent this month. I'm really struggling."* I don't have a problem with that at all. God is concerned about what we are concerned about.

The problem comes when that is your goal in life. If your goal is to be comfortable, that's how you will pray and you will miss out on a lot of things God has for you. If your goal in life is to have health and wealth then maybe you will have them and maybe you won't but you will miss out on some really rich blessings God has for you.

But...I hear ya. *"Todd, what else is there in this life other than to be comfortable? What else should we pray for in this life?"* Well, I believe that's the wrong question to ask. It's wrong because this life is not all there is. In fact, this life is only a test. It is a small warmup. It's the pregame show. It's not the real thing. It's only leading up to the real thing that happens in the next life and lasts forever.

Let me put it this way. Do you remember a specific test you took in middle school? Do you remember all the questions you were asked and all the answers you gave? Probably not. And that's okay because the point of that test was not so you would be able to do well on that test. The purpose of that test and all the other tests you took all through school was to increase your knowledge so you would be a productive member of society. The purpose of school is not so you will do well in school. It's so you will do well in life. School is just life prep.

I used to know a man who just could not quit going to school. After college, he went to seminary and after he went to the seminary, he got his doctorate. Then he went back and took other classes and studied other fields. And he pretty much went to school his whole life and never really had a job that meant anything and never really made anything of his life. He died well educated but his life never reached its full potential.

Just like this life is not about school, your life is not about this life! It should be about the next life, our eternal life in Heaven. And when we start to see and understand that our prayer life will change. What we pray for will change. Who we pray for will change and how fervently we pray will change also.

If I could get anybody, living or dead, to pray for our church, I have a man in mind. And when I say “our church” I mean our church as a whole and us as individuals. If I could get anybody to pray for us, it would have to be the Apostle Paul. Paul knew how to pray and he knew what to pray. He knew what was important and he prayed a lot and prayed fervently.

Let’s turn to the little New Testament book of Colossians to start off our new year with the right kind of prayer. Colossians is between **Philippians** and **1 Thessalonians** and it only has four chapters so look close. This church in Colosse was actually started, not by Paul, but by a man named Epaphras who lived there in the city. In fact, we don’t believe that Paul ever even saw this church but only heard about it from Epaphras. Evidently, Epaphras had heard Paul preach the Gospel, accepted it and went back to his hometown and started this church and then later reported to Paul how it was doing.

So, after getting the report from Epaphras, Paul wrote this letter and starts off in a way that is familiar but it is the prayer in **verses 9-14** that I want to focus on. But let’s start with **verse 1** to keep it all in context. **Colossians 1:1-14** says, *“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 in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. 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, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our 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, 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 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.”

Good grief, Paul! Paul writes like some of y’all pack those OCC shoeboxes. You know what I mean? I watched some of y’all pack those shoeboxes so full. You packed a hat, shorts, shoes, a game, some school supplies, hygiene stuff, four toys and a puppy into that box until the lid would barely close. Well, Paul writes like that. There are maybe three or four sentences in here and he says more profound ideas in there than I’ll say in a lifetime.

But Paul gets it. He understands prayer and he understands life and it has made all the difference to him. I’m actually amazed at what Paul leaves out here because if I were Paul, I would have started way differently. If I were Paul, my first words would have been, “*Hi y’all, grace and peace and stuff. Now, somebody get me outta this jail! Anybody know a good lawyer? Can somebody please put some money on my books? I need some hygiene items and some Dr. Pepper in the worst way. Somebody please help me!*” But not Paul. It’s not until **chapter 4** that he even gives a hint that he’s in jail and he only mentions it so they will pray that he will be able to proclaim the Gospel while he’s in chains.

See, for Paul, the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus – was his life. That’s what he was concerned about. He says so in our passage here. Did you catch it? Look first at **verse 9**. He says, “*For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.*” What reason, Paul? The reason comes from **verse 6** where he says, “*the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world...*”

It's because the Gospel was being preached and taught and sung and proclaimed in every way there in Colosse that Paul was praying so fervently for them. He knew they needed healing. He knew they weren't wealthy. He knew they needed all kinds of other help but his concern was for the Gospel. That was his main concern because the Gospel is why we as Christians are here. It is the purpose of our lives. Our purpose is not to be comfortable. Our purpose as individuals and as a church is to spread the Gospel. We want others to have what we have.

So...finally...let's look at exactly how Paul was praying for this church and let's study it so we will know how to pray for Christ Fellowship and all the other churches. Look at **verse 9** one more time. *"We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives..."* Stop right there for now. There's a lot to unpack just in that one sentence. Paul wants them to be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

That word "filled" is a word some of us can relate to over the holidays. Some of us ate until we were filled and then we didn't want to do anything. I'm sure there are some people that got filled with alcohol and started doing stupid stuff because of it. The word here means to be controlled by something. Paul wants the knowledge of God's will to fill them and control them.

That knowledge that he is talking about is a common theme in Paul's writing and at least partly because he was writing to people who were devoted to it. Like Paul was devoted to the Gospel, the people in these areas and in these times were devoted to gaining knowledge. They wanted to be smart and that desire is not wrong. The problem is, they went to the wrong places to find that knowledge.

In **Philippians 1**, Paul starts that letter by telling them he wants that church to grow in knowledge and discernment. There is a lot of so-called knowledge out there but we need to make sure we have absolute truth. *"Well, Todd, how do we know what is truth and what is not? It's hard to tell these days."* Ooh! Good question! So just look at what else Paul says in this verse. *"the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives..."* Paul is praying that the Holy Spirit of God will give them the absolute truth and knowledge of God's will.

Okay, but why is it so important to know God's will? Well, Paul addresses that in the next part of the sentence in **verse 10**. *"...so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way..."*

Okay, let's put it all together so far. Paul is praying for this church to be controlled by the absolute truth, given by God, so that they may please God. So, what does that look like? Well, a little over a year ago, our church was forced to leave Lake Bridgeport where we had been for over ten years. We didn't have any place to go and we felt that we were not treated fairly and lovingly to say the least. But, after lots of intense prayer, we did what we felt was right and God led us to this building and He has blessed us ever since. And we know that God has called us here to Chico and we see His hand at work in the life of this church every day.

See, the Spirit of God gave our church wisdom. We understood that His will for our church was not to be in Lake Bridgeport, but here in Chico. And here in Chico we are doing what pleases God. That's what **verses 9-10** look like in the life of our church. We don't yet know what God has in store for us here but we are doing what He calls us to do as He calls us to do it.

Then, do you know what that leads to? Look at the last part of **verse 10**. It leads to bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God. What that means is that we are able to help others in our community and around the world like we do with our food pantry and with those shoeboxes we pack. And we are able to know God better through doing all of that.

So, those are the first two things that Paul prayed for that church about but there's another. So, first Paul prayed they would have knowledge and wisdom (**verse 9**) and then to please God (**verse 10**) and then look in **verse 11**. *"...being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience..."*

You know what that means? Keep doing it. Keep going. Keep getting God's wisdom and understanding. Keep on pleasing God. Don't stop bearing fruit by helping others with the food pantry and shoeboxes and everything else. Continue to grow in our knowledge of God. And we do that by continuing to meet together and all the more as the time gets near for His return (Heb. 10:25). We do that by being holy as He is holy which means we are different and set apart.

We have to keep doing what God has called us to do and has given us the power to do. It's hard to do that with the world pulling us in every other direction. It's hard to stay strong and stay holy. This world will call that foolishness or even wrong but we have the power of the risen Jesus that lives inside of us to accomplish what He has called us to do. And that leads to the last thing in Paul's prayer.

Look at **verse 12**. *"giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light."* You know, if you turned in your Bible one page to the left, to the book of Philippians, you would find in the fourth chapter, these beautiful words, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* (Phil. 4:6)

Paul commands it in Philippians and obeys it in Colossians. He is praying for this church and praying that they would know God better, serve others deeper, please God with their holiness and then Paul gives God joyful thanks for giving that church the power to do it.

That's what I want for our church. I want 2024 to be when we really start focusing on being filled – controlled – by God's will; that we may bear fruit in our food pantry, jail ministry, shoeboxes, giving and outreach to the community. I pray that we know God deeper and that He would give us the power, the strength and the patience to keep on doing it until He returns.

And right now I just give God joyful thanks for giving us our inheritance, as Paul says in **verse 12**. That inheritance is Heaven. We aren't guaranteed health and wealth in this life and that's okay because we know that this life is short and it is not our focus. Our focus is on the next life where God has promised us all the glories of Heaven to be shared as co-heirs with Jesus.

Do you know for sure that if you died today that you would have that inheritance? You can be sure. All you have to do is give your life to God. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, God will forgive all your sins. Jesus paid the price, the price of death, for your sins, a price you could never pay. And all you have to do is believe it. But that belief will show itself in a changed life that lives for Jesus and only for Him. Do that right now. Ask God to forgive all your sins. Then turn away from those sins and allow God's Spirit to come into your life and give you the power you need to stay away from those sins forever. Do it right now as the music plays.