

On Monday, my lower back went completely out, and for the majority of the week, the most comfortable position I could find to alleviate the pain was on my knees next to my bed as if I was praying. So, I did a lot more praying this week since I was already in the position, and I was reminded of a conversation between three ministers who were talking about prayer and the appropriate and effective positions for prayer, and as they were talking, a telephone repairman was working on the phone system in the background.

One minister shared that he felt the key to prayer was in the hands. He always held his hands together and pointed them upward as a form of symbolic worship. The second minister suggested that real prayer was conducted in humility on your knees. The third suggested that they both had it wrong--the only position worth its salt was to pray while laying prostate flat on the floor.

By this time the phone man couldn't stay out of the conversation any longer. He chimed in and said, "You know, I found that the most powerful prayer I ever made was while I was dangling upside down by my feet from a telephone pole, suspended forty feet above the ground."

Dangling by one's feet in the air will certainly prompt some serious and powerful prayer – the kind of prayer where one makes all kinds of promises to God. Last week we began our study in Colossians which began with a prayer of thanksgiving by the Apostle Paul for the church in Colossae, and in these next few verses, Paul's prayer continues, but his focus shifts from thanksgiving to intercession.

Now, if you recall from last week, Paul who is confined in Rome awaiting trial, received a report from Epaphras about his young and impressionable congregation some 1000 miles away in Colossae. It was a good report about the church, they were faithful and loving, they seemed to be thriving but there was a concern – false teachers had moved into the area – claiming they were “*in the know*” when it came to matters about God – suggesting they knew the deeper truths about Jesus Christ, and they knew a better way than the Gospel. Epaphras saw this as a serious threat to his congregation of new believers who were sponges for knowledge, and he needed some advice from Paul which eventually prompted this very letter to the Colossians.

Paul begins this letter with prayer – and it's a prayer we need to pay careful attention to for it's a prayer which really shows us how we ought to pray for others. So, if you have your Bible, lets continue with **Colossians 1** beginning with **verse 9** where we are told,

⁹ For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Paul begins this one long sentence with the words “**For this reason**” which begs the question “*For what reason?*” Well, because of the good report he received from Epaphras, hearing the church in Colossae was doing well – for that reason, Paul says he has **not ceased to pray** for them.

You know for some, it might seem unnecessary to pray for those who are doing well, and I have no doubts that our tendency is to mostly pray for those who are facing difficulties, to pray for those who are in trouble, to pray for those who are struggling – and we absolutely should for those people, but we must not forget to pray for those who are doing well because they are prime targets of the enemy and a battle is brewing. Resistance and opposition are coming – and for the church in Colossae, sure enough, the false teachers were already there trying to wiggle their way in. So, believers who seem to be doing well need prayer just as much as those who are not.

Now before we move on, I want to clarify what Paul means by *unceasing prayer*. **Does that mean Paul is praying for them 24 hours a day?** No, it does not. What Paul is talking about an attitude of prayer – where as he goes about his life, he’s conscious of God’s presence and God’s work around him. As he walks, as he looks around, as he sees people, as he interacts with them, as he hears about things, Paul’s thoughts habitually turn into prayer. It was a lifestyle of prayer for Paul.

I don’t know about you, but often times when I am talking to someone, especially when it comes to sharing the Gospel, I find myself praying for them at the same time, and here with Paul, as he thinks about this church, his thoughts habitually turn to prayer, and his prayer for them is this – that they **may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding**.

That word *filled* in the Greek means *complete* – but it has less to do with *content* and more to do with *control*. For example, if I say anger has filled your heart, that implies you no longer have control, instead your anger has control over you –

anger has a consuming influence over you. When Paul tells the **Ephesians** to be *filled* with the Spirit, he means to be controlled by the Spirit which comes as a result of our complete surrender to Him, and here in **verse 9**, Paul is telling these Colossian believers his prayer for them is that they may be controlled by the knowledge of God's will, and this knowledge that Paul speaks about is not just head knowledge, it's not just theological knowledge – it's the knowledge that comes by experience – it's knowledge that sees things from God's perspective, reasons it out, and then applies that knowledge in practical ways. That's the **spiritual wisdom** and **understanding** Paul is talking about.

James talked about this very thing when he said, ***“We are to be doers of the Word and not merely hearers”*** meaning, it's not enough for us to think that simply hearing and studying God's Word is sufficient – it needs to be practiced – it needs to be applied – it needs to be followed – it needs to be experienced – there has to be some personal involvement with it if it is going to really take hold of us and transform us.

So, Paul's prayer is that God would fill these believers with knowledge, because what fills you controls you, and this knowledge he prays for is the knowledge of God's will. Paul wants the Colossians to know God's will – to see things from God's perspective – to reason out how God's will might apply in their own lives, and then allow it to govern them. That's what Paul wants to see for this church, that they would know and follow God's will no matter what, no matter the cost – God's will has to become their will, and in **verse 10**, he tells them why. He says,

so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Paul prays that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God's will *so that* – that's a purpose statement – *so that* they would **walk** in a manner worthy of the Lord. In other words, if you are controlled with the knowledge of God's will, the next thing is to walk according to His will. There should be no separation between learning and living.

Now, I like that word “*walk*” which describes the way we live our lives because it gives us the simple picture of taking one step at a time, repeated over and over again through a period of time. That's walking, it's not confusing – step by step, day by day, Paul's prayer is that in everything they would please God and bear fruit.

His prayer is they would keep walking every day in a **manner worthy of the Lord**, or said another way, keep walking just like Jesus walked. Now of course, we will never walk like Jesus walked, but He is our model, He is our example, He is the one we are to follow, and as we do so, in the power of the Holy Spirit we will bear fruit in every good work, and not only that, but as we experience Him in our daily lives, our personal relationship and intimacy with God will increase. It has to, but that's not all. Let's continue beginning with **verse 11** where Paul says,

¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

As we walk worthy of the Lord, His power is there to help us meet all of life's challenges. When I thought about that word "power" my mind immediately when to the old hymn "*There is Power in the Blood.*" I'm going to read a portion of it to you.

*Would you be free from the burden of sin?
There's power in the blood, power in the blood;
Would you o'er evil a victory win?
There's wonderful power in the blood.*

Chorus:

*There is power, power, wonder-working power
In the blood of the Lamb.
There is power, power, wonder-working power
In the precious blood of the Lamb.*

That sounds great. I think we all want that kind of power – wonder-working power – power for victory over evil, but notice that the power Paul mentions here is for **the attaining of all steadfastness and patience.** **Now what does he mean by that?**

Well **steadfastness** is the Greek word "*hupomone*" which means to *remain under*. So, God gives us the power to remain under – **but to remain under what?** To remain under the weight and pressure of difficult circumstances. This is the power that God gives us to stay in the fire without looking for an escape.

The truth is for all of us, when the difficult circumstances come, we naturally want to get out from under them as soon as we can – we are looking for an escape route,

but there are times when we need to remain under the weight and under pressure so God can accomplish His purposes in us and through us.

God uses difficult circumstances to produce transformation, but you've got to stay under it to get the full effect and benefit. Think about it this way:

- *The nail that doesn't remain under the hammer will never reach the goal.*
- *The diamond that doesn't remain under the chisel will never become a precious jewel.*
- *The gold that doesn't remain under the fire will never be refined.*
- *The Christian who doesn't remain under the hand of God will never see the purpose for the difficulty accomplished in their life.*

God knows the difficult circumstances that we face. He knows the things that have happened to us, but He uses these things to transform us and to conform us to the image of His Son. That's God's great purpose and will for us. To be more like Jesus.

Chuck Swindoll told a story about a lunch he had with a businessman who runs his own company. As they talked, the subject of wisdom kept popping up in their conversation. They agreed on the value of certain qualities that cannot be learned in school – things like intuition, diligence, integrity, perception, consistency, loyalty – when the businessman again mentioned wisdom.

*So, Chuck asked, “**How does a person get wisdom?** I realize we are to be men of wisdom, but few people ever talk about how it is acquired.” His answer was quick and to the point: “Pain.”*

If I may describe this another way, life is a series of high mountain tops and low valleys. We learn very little on the mountain tops. Our learning tends to occur in the valleys, but thankfully, God is with us in our valleys and He gives us the power to remain under the circumstances. God knows what He's doing, so we have to hang in there and let Him finish what He has started.

So, Paul prays the God would give power to deal with difficult circumstances, but that's not all – He also prays for power to deal with difficult people. Paul prays for **patience**, which is another word for *long-suffering* – patience to deal with the people who are hard to live with, the people you want to scream at, the people who are driving you crazy – the people you want to retaliate against who have wronged you.

Now, you might be saying, “*Hey, that’s not the kind of power I was hoping for*” but that’s the kind of power Paul is praying for – the power to remain under difficult circumstances and the power to be patient with difficult people, and if that’s not bad enough, Paul prays they would do all of it with **joyful thanks to the Father**.

A little girl was being punished by eating alone in the corner of the dining room. The family paid no attention to her until they heard her pray: “I thank Thee, O Lord, for preparing a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

I don’t think that is the joyful thanks Paul was thinking about, instead biblical joy speaks to the *inner contentment* we can have because we know that God is doing something through the difficulties to accomplish His purposes *in* us and *through* us, and remember, Paul is writing all of this while he is confined under the watchful eye of a Roman soldier.

As I was studying this week, I found another definition of joy which I really like. Someone has said joy is “*grace recognized*” and the more I think about that, the more I like it. Joy is grace recognized. As Christians who recognize God’s grace, despite our difficulties, we can give joyful thanks, and Paul gives us a reason why. He says, because the Father **has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light**, speaking of our salvation.

Before our salvation, God was our Judge and we stood condemned before Him, but by God’s grace, He has qualified us meaning He made us fit for His presence and our inheritance.

There is a story told of an old man who owned a little plot of land with a poor miserable cabin on it. Plots in his neighborhood had been selling for fabulous prices and he felt that someday his place would make him a fortune. By and by a millionaire came along and seeing the possibilities of that block, said, “I want the whole thing.”

He sent his agent to buy the whole block, and when he came to the old man, he asked, “What is the price of your place?” As the old man had waited long for this opportunity, he priced it at what he thought was a tremendously big figure. “Very well,” said the agent, “I will take it.”

“When do you want it?” the old man asked.

“In about two weeks I will be around with the deed and you can be ready to sign it. Here is a thousand dollars to bind the sale,” replied the agent.

The old man was simply delighted and thought, “Well, if somebody has bought this place who is able to pay all that money, I ought to fix it up a bit.” And so, he bought some paint and went to work painting the old cabin. He bought some glass to replace the broken panes, and for two weeks he worked on the cabin. When this millionaire purchaser and his agent brought the papers for him to sign, he was so nervous about it he could hardly hold the pen. He was surprised that the purchaser did not say anything about the shack and so he said, “You see how beautifully I have painted it up and have put in some new windows. It is going to make a nice place. I hope you will be very comfortable in it.

“Oh,” said the millionaire, “I didn’t buy this place for what’s on it or for what you did with it, I bought it for what I am going to do with it.”

That’s how God qualifies us. By His grace, He took us as just we were – not because we made ourselves fit, not because of what’s in us, but because of what He is going to do with us. He has made us fit, and has put us in a right standing with Himself to be in His presence and to share the inheritance of the saints, and knowing all of this, even while dealing with difficult circumstances and difficult people, by God’s grace and power we can still do it joyfully.

Now, in these last two verses of his prayer, Paul is going to explain how God qualified us and we became saints. Beginning with **verse 13**, Paul says,

¹³ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

These two verses paint a clear picture of the saving actions of Christ on our behalf. First, we are told that God **rescued us** from the **domain of darkness**. That Greek word for *rescued* is *rhyomai* and it was used to describe a soldier going to a wounded comrade on the battlefield and snatching him away to safety. Because of our sin and guilt, we were in grave danger – in danger of spending eternity apart from God, but for those who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, God rescued us (*past tense*) from the power and penalty of sin meaning it’s already been done – it’s a done deal. We have been rescued.

Paul also tells us that God **transferred us** to the kingdom of His beloved Son. That word *transferred* was used to describe the deportation of a population from one country to another. If you remember from previous studies, that’s what the

Assyrians would do to a conquered people – move them from their homeland to another place to dispel any notion of nationalism that could lead to a rebellion. Here, we too were transferred (*past tense again*) – it’s already been done, transferred out of the ruling power of darkness in our lives and into the light. God has already moved us out so He might bring us into a new home, a new life, and a new identity in Christ.

Now, if you will notice in the last verse, with those words “**we have**” that tells us what comes next is *present tense*, meaning we currently possess **redemption, the forgiveness of sins**. It’s not something we wait for down the road – redemption and forgiveness, which are closely connected, are already in our possession. Jesus paid the full price with His blood to release us from the bondage of sin, He paid the ransom, and as a result, our guilt was sent away.

So, that was Paul’s prayer for the church in Colossae – a prayer that they may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, and that’s the kind of prayer we should want for ourselves. We need to lift each other up in prayer to discern God will and to stay faithful to the truth, especially in a world of lies.

We need to pray that our lives would honor God, praying that we would know and do what pleases Him, and lastly, we need to pray for strength to endure difficult circumstances and to be patient with difficult people. This is the kind of prayer for each of us, and to drive this home I want you do so something.

Think about a person you know at church, at work, at school, or in your family. Whether he or she is a believer or unbeliever, pray for that person. Spend time going through the things I’ve mentioned. Intercede for that person daily over the next several weeks, and as you do, know that you are praying according to God’s will and that God delights in imparting things that can only come from Him: true knowledge, real holiness, and enduring strength.

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