

Colossians 1:9-12a And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,<sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;<sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;<sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father

## Colossians 1:9-12a | Prayer

Today I feel like I am describing to you an old friend. There is no prayer I have prayed more frequently than this one, since I first committed it to memory my senior year of college. I have prayed it for my wife, friends, our church, my children nearly every day. It has become to me a prayer which in a sense prays me. It shapes my mind and my hopes. I often pray it for our church as I'm standing before coming up to preach.

In this letter Paul is praying for a young church to mature in their faith. It is typical of Paul to only offer instruction, encouragement or rebuke in the context of prayer which he shares with his hearers. What this tells us about Paul's ministry is that he understands it does not belong to him. His encouragement and instruction must be rooted in prayer because his ministry, just like any of our ministries, is only effective by the work of the spirit. Christian maturity can not take place outside of the context of prayer. It is the means that God has given us to connect the small actions we take to the grand narrative he is accomplishing.

And just a little aside. God hears your prayers, and works through them so that you might have more joy. I have prayed many prayers, that have begun something like this, "Ugh I guess I should pray." And being in no higher state of consciousness I have forced out a prayer, and God has heard me and answered that prayer. What I'm saying is, we don't pray so that we can get our heads up into the heavens, we pray because we know God has come down to us. So for all of Paul's ministry, he prays. In his prayer, we see Paul lay out a pattern of Christian maturity.

We'll see the spiral of growth, the tools for perseverance, and the overflow of thanksgiving.

### 1. The Growth Spiral

Colossians 1:9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

The "and so" is actually a really important connection to the previous verses which we looked at last week, in which Paul described his gratitude for the gospel taking root and establishing this young church. And we can see the parallel, just as they heard the gospel and became established in it, so too Paul heard about them and began participating in their establishment by prayer.

The prayer in a sense which you will see, looks like a circle, but it is actually a spiral which describes how we mature as Christians. It is a spiral of growth which begins with being filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Notice first of all that it is not a filling up of yourself, but a being filled. The knowledge of God's will is a gift given to us by God himself through his Spirit. This is another reason Paul centers his ministry on prayer. God himself is the one who acts to show himself to us. And of course how else could it be? God is personal, and we are learning him, and we do not learn a person unless they reveal themselves to us. But Paul can pray confidently that God will fill the Colossians with the knowledge of his will.

Ephesians 1:9 (NIV) he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,

You see it is the good pleasure of God to reveal himself to us and thus fill us with true knowledge of him. Our God desires us to know him. I think one of the great surprises for my wife was how quiet I could be. Some of us find it difficult to share ourselves, but God doesn't.

Colossians 1:9b asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

So what is Paul referring to? Here we see three correlative terms; knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

**Knowledge of his will:** Is an understanding of the whole of God's saving purposes in Christ. The Gospel is not just an action that God has taken, but also a revealing of his very heart. In the sending of his son, we see his great love for the world. In the gospel we see his will revealed for sinners to be saved by grace. But this will of his grand plan of redemption operates at the personal level of our lives so that we might discern what his will is in the particulars of our obedience to him. We receive this knowledge through spiritual wisdom and understanding.

**Spiritual wisdom & Understanding:** Is a character that is shaped by an understanding of who you are before God. It begins with a fear of the Lord which recognizes we are not the Lord. We stand as his creatures beneath him and over the world. This couples with understanding in that we are able to look out into the world as ourselves and think practically about the way God is working out his good purposes.

This is so different from how our culture thinks about wisdom and understanding. Since the scientific revolution we have thought that the best way to gain understanding about the world is to remove ourselves and our subjectivity from it so that we might attain an uncorrupted and objective perspective on reality, something that is relationally detached. But the Bible teaches us wisdom in precisely the opposite, it begins relationally, with our

understanding of God and how he relates to us and us to him. From this central relational understanding we are able to understand how it is that we are meant to relate to the world. You see this knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding is describing a person who is shaped by their relationship to God shown in the gospel.

Colossians 1:10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

This knowledge of God's will is not a detached assessment but is able to be implemented and lived out. In fact it must be lived out for it to be effective knowledge that grows and develops. Paul here prays that their knowledge of the Lord would allow the Colossians to walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to the Lord.

Is Paul just praying something impossibly high for the Colossians? Or worse is he heaping up an impossible standard for them to abide? No. He is praying that they would be ushered into this reality of the new creation they have become in Christ. That in Christ, they are now able to walk in such a way which by the spirit is worthy of and pleasing to the Lord. Of course Paul knows that we are not in this life made perfect. And that once we become Christians it is not as though we are no longer capable of sinning, or that sin no longer rages in us. But, a new door has opened. For once we were incapable of pleasing God, but now in his Spirit we can.

This new creation that we are operates just like the old creation was intended to, it bears fruit and multiplies. And that is precisely Paul's hope for the Colossians. They will begin to bear fruit in every good work. So that their lives would be participants in the new creation that God had secured in Christ.

And here is where the shape of Paul's prayer for Christian maturity becomes a spiral. A life based on true knowledge of God and lived out of that knowledge leads to a deeper knowledge of God.

Knowledge begets holiness, begets knowledge, begets holiness.

John 14:21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

The mature christian pursues holiness, because they pursue knowledge of God. What is it to know God? What could possibly be a higher aim for your life? What could possibly be more encouraging than this God dying for you to know him? Come to the Gospel be remade know the Lord be remade. Be sure of this, you will face opposition. So Paul prays for their growth.

## 2. Tools for Perseverance

Colossians 1:11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

Our God is a powerful God. He rescued his people from Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. He makes empires to rise and fall. Our God is mighty to save. We are weak and faint-hearted. You may be considering to yourself, that you are in nothing like a growth spiral. Then let us practice together knowing the Lord personally in the gospel. We are weak, he is strong, he attends our weakness and saves us.

So then we are strengthened by him. In accord with what? His Glorious might!

So what do you think his glorious might equips you with? The best apologetic one liners? The ability to defeat God's enemies, especially in the culture wars, as if there is any other kind. Look it is endurance and patience with joy. These are our weapons and our tools. The cool quiet spirit which understands that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is in control of all things and he will accomplish his purposes.

Endurance is needed to face impossible situations, and patience is needed to face impossible people. You will face both. And the Christian who understands Christ's work will be able to do so with joy.

## 2. Saturated in Thanksgiving

Colossians 1:12<sup>a</sup> giving thanks to the Father

Lastly, all of this prayer is grounded in thanksgiving to the father. The Christian life is a life which flows from gratitude to the father.

Thank you father for saving us, for guiding us, for protecting us, for showing yourself to us. We are overwhelmed with this opportunity.

So let us revisit the prayer again.

Colossians 1:9-12a And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father