

**Alderwood Community Church**  
**August 14, 2016**

**A Life That Pleases God**  
Colossians 1:9-14

Intro: Compare our way of praying with the way that Paul prays in this passage. Suppose for example, that 80 or 90 percent of our prayers are asking God for good health, recovery from illness, safety on the road, a good job, success on the exams that we take in school, the emotional needs of our children, success in our mortgage application, and more of the same. How much of Paul's praying revolves around equivalent items? Most of the time when I pray with other believers, I would have to say not much of our praying matches the kinds of things Paul prayed for.

This passage of Scripture should be looked at as a model prayer. Not to make us feel guilty, but to challenge us to change the way we view prayer and the way we actually pray, privately and together with other believers.

\*Read Text: Colossians 1:9-14

Big Idea: Pleasing God should be the primary focus of our prayers for one another.

**Lessons from the context of Paul's prayer:**

**1. Enlarge our prayers to include other believers outside our immediate circle.**

*"because we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus..." (1:4)*

Paul is writing to a church he has never visited, a church apparently founded by Epaphras, himself a Colossian, who was likely led to the Lord through Paul's ministry. Though he never visited them, Paul assures the Colossian Christians he is praying for them – for his spiritual grandchildren. So Paul, apparently added this group of believers to his prayer list, so he would not stop praying for them.

We should ask ourselves this question, how extensive is my praying? Do all my prayer requests revolve around my family, my church and my small circle of friends? Of course our primary responsibility is to pray for our family and close friends, but if that is the furthest extent of our prayers perhaps our world is too self-centered.

While we cannot pray for everyone, it would be good for us to begin praying for groups of Christians we hear reports on in several parts of the world. Such as believers who are being ministered to by our missionaries or other groups of people.

Illus: In Albania, we had the privilege to witness the gathering of 10 churches (around 400 in attendance) and watch the baptism of around 22 people. My heart has now bonded with those people and the congregation in Pogradats, where Cory Cramer, Chad Lambert and Albanian Pastor Erion minister. I also was able to meet Pastor Ean, a Brit, who has served in Albania for over 25 years and is responsible for training and raising up Pastor Erion and the other pastors of the 10 churches that have been planted out of the Korche church. Now you too can pray this prayer for them and expand your own ministry and become more of a world Christian.

**2. Pray consistently for spiritual perception and obedience to God in the lives of other believers.** *“we have not stopped praying for you...”* (1:9)

This doesn't mean that Paul literally prays 24 hrs a day for them. Paul is essentially telling the Colossian believers that since he has heard about them, he has made it a point to intercede with God on their behalf regularly during his times of prayer.

Paul is also implying that there are some things for which we must pray again and again. Such as the need to have spiritual perception, to obey Christ each and every day, and to daily appropriate the blessings that are ours because of our relationship with God through Jesus. There are certain things that we need again and again, constantly, if we are to live lives that are pleasing to God.

The unceasing nature of Paul's praying serves as a model for us to learn persistence in our prayers for one another.

**3. Don't limit prayer to asking God to “fix” the problems of other believers, but pray “preventative” prayers.** *“For this reason...”* (1:9)

Paul's prayer is linked to his thanksgiving for them, and this leads to an extremely important conclusion: although we are inclined to pray for people and situations when they have fallen into desperate need, Paul's common practice is to pray for ongoing obedience and spiritual maturity of these believers, whom he has never met, may I remind you.

Consider our own prayers for a moment. Is it not true that we are inclined to pray with a great deal more urgency when things are going badly? When there is illness, financial pressure, moral failure, dissension in the church, a difficult decision or tension in our family – those are the times when we are driven to prayer. In itself, that is not bad. It is vital to go to God in conversation for ourselves or others during time of need or fear.

But if we pray only at those times, we are overlooking a great lesson from the Apostle Paul's prayer life. When Paul learns of the work God is doing in some church, he gives thanks; then he prays for still more of the same, for more grace, more faith, more love, more hope and more obedience. So even when he hears great news about other believers, he knows that their obedience and progress in the faith needs to be protected and increased.

We should ask ourselves if our instinct is in the same direction as Paul's. Do we feel most constrained to pray when our church experiences conflict, or when there have been several conversions and seemingly spiritual victories? Are we as eager to pray for our children when they seem to be making great progress in the faith as when they are making poor choices and falling under the influence of bad friends?

### **Lessons from the content of Paul's prayer:**

This prayer is essentially one request, followed by the very purpose for the request, which is then followed by a description of the way God's answer to the prayer works out in daily life.

#### **1. Ask God to fill believers with knowledge of His will. (Col. 1:9)**

##### **A. Let's think through what Paul means by "*the knowledge of God's will.*"**

Most of the time when we use the expression *the will of God* we refer to God's specific will for our vocation or some aspect of the future that will be determined by an upcoming choice we have to make. We "*seek the Lord's will*" over whom we should marry, over major purchases, over what church to attend and whether we should take that job that would require us to move to another city.

None of this is intrinsically bad, There are many ways in which the Lord does lead us, but the danger is that we tend to look at God's will primarily in terms of my future, my vocation and my needs – that is often another form of self-centeredness.

Consider these passages of Scriptures that teaches us about God's will:

*"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."*  
Psalm 143:10

To do the will of God in this passage is virtually synonymous with obeying what God has mandated. What God has mandated is his will; and our responsibility is to do it. The Psalmist doesn't encourage us to find God's will, for he assumes it is known already. Rather, he is concerned with performance of that will. When he says, "Teach me," he does not say, "Teach me your will," but "Teach me to do your will."

*"Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."* Ephesians 5:15-17

Over against the evil and folly of the surrounding society, where, because of laziness and hedonism, people squander opportunities that the Lord graciously gives, Christians are to make the most of every opportunity, to avoid foolishness and show that they understand what the will

of the Lord is. The next verses contrast the debauchery of drunkenness with the joy of being filled with the Spirit, a filling which results in right relationships at every level of society. That is the way understanding “what the Lord’s will is” will be worked out in believer’s lives.

*“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.” 1 Thessalonians 4:3*

He goes on to describe what God’s will looks like, he describes sanctification as the reserving of your physical body for God’s purposes, it means demonstrating sexual self-control and honoring God by refusing to engage in sexual relations outside of marriage between one man and one woman, and to do so is not only contrary to God’s will, but believers will suffer punishment for such disobedience.

*“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

It is foolish to pretend to seek God’s will for your life, in terms of marriage or even some form of Christian vocation, when there is no deep desire to pursue God’s will as he has already kindly revealed it.

### **B. Let’s explain the phrase *through all spiritual wisdom and understanding***

The Greek preposition *through* is best translated “which consists of.” So the knowledge of God’s will consists of wisdom and understanding at the spiritual level.

Wisdom is often tied in the Scripture to *knowing how to live*, how to respond to situations in life. Understanding is *knowing why we should* live or respond that way. Understanding is comprehension, insight, and discernment.

### **C. What does it mean to be “filled?”**

Being filled means to be completely filled or totally controlled. It has the idea that God’s will is so much a part of your thinking, that it is on the front of your mind. I think the idea is that we would be saturated with God’s will

It also carries the idea of being controlled by something. The disciples’ hearts were *filled with sorrow* when Jesus told them of His departure (John 16:6). The scribes and Pharisees were *filled with rage* after Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Luke 6:11). The disciples were *filled with the Holy Spirit* (Acts 4:31), while Stephen was *full of faith* (Acts 6:5). In each case they were totally under the control of what filled them.

Paul’s prayer is that the Colossians would be totally controlled by a deep and thorough knowledge of God’s will, his desire for their lives.

His prayer is likely motivated as well by his concern over some false teaching that had crept into the church that he addresses in chapter 2 (2:8-10). So Paul prays that they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will so they would detect the error of the false teaching and would be able to withstand the pressure to conform to the false teaching as well as to the temptations of the pagan culture around them.

Can you think of anything that our own generation more urgently needs than this? We are constantly bombarded with messages in our culture to cater to our fleshly desires, to live for comfort and self-satisfaction and to question whether or not Jesus really is sufficient for our salvation and our sanctification.

But where do we get this knowledge of God's will? It is through the Spirit of God illuminating the Word of God. We need to deliberately and regularly read and mediate on God's Word. When we present our minds to God's truth, then we can know them and the Spirit can give us understanding and help us apply them at the appropriate moments through out our day.

**2. Ask God that believers would live their lives so they would please Him in every way.  
(Col. 1:10-12)**

Here is the ultimate reason for this prayer. *"in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and my please him in every way."* (1:10) His prayer is ultimately, not that they would simply fill their heads with Bible knowledge, but that the knowledge of God's will would translate into the way they actually live their lives.

*"Worthy"* means comparable value or worth. It means aligning the way we live to match who we really are and to whom we belong. To live as children of God. To live as children of light. Paul then spells out exactly what it means to *"live a life worthy of the Lord"* he says we are to *please him in every way*.

So here it is. Paul essentially is praying that the Colossians believers would live lives that are pleasing to God. Can you think of anything more important to pray than this? Can you think of anything more comprehensive to pray for than this?

Pleasing God was so important to Paul that he even said that was his highest ambition in life: *"So we make it our goal [ambition] to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad."* 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

For Paul, to be a Christian, to confess Jesus as Lord, meant to adopt a world view in which you are bound to please him in every way. Not to do so would be to bring shame on him whom you have confessed as Lord.

If pleasing our Lord is our greatest ambition in life then we will continually ask ourselves, *What would Jesus have me do?* This question will transform how we work, what we do with leisure time, how we talk with our spouses and children, what responsibilities we take on in our churches, what we read, what we watch on television, how we treat our neighbors, what we do with our money.

Paul then goes on to describe what it means to live a life *that pleases God in every way*:

**A. Pray that they would bear fruit in every good work. (Col. 1:10)**

Our beliefs, if they are genuine, must translate into behavior. Paul cannot fathom anyone being pleasing to God without bearing fruit in good works.

*“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10*

Unfortunately, Christians do not always put the truth they believe into practice. Marva J. Dawn draws from Neil Postman’s work *Amusing Ourselves to Death* and argues “that television has habituated its watchers to a low information-action ratio, that people are accustomed to ‘learning’ good ideas (even from sermons) and then doing nothing about them.” We learn enough to talk about it intelligently but never follow through on action. Paul does not praise the Colossians simply because they have learned the truth from Epaphras (1:7) but because their faith has led to concrete results. The test of faith is whether it makes any difference in the way we live and treat others.

**B. Pray that they would grow in the knowledge of God. (Col. 1:10)**

The axiom that the rich get richer is particularly true in the spiritual sphere: Knowledge of God’s will brings even more knowledge and spiritual growth. Sin becomes a vicious cycle as it plunges us deeper and deeper into degradation. Knowledge of God becomes a virtuous cycle as it leads us deeper and deeper into fulfilling God’s sovereign purposes.

Living as God desires leads to greater understanding. E. D. Martin outlines a progressive pattern:

To receive the gospel is to come to know God.

To know God is to do his will.

To do his will is to know more and more of God.

**C. Pray that they would be empowered by God: (Col. 1:11)**

Knowledge alone does not enable obedience. Paul petitions God to give his readers not only spiritual discernment of his will but also the divine power to do it. That power has been revealed in the resurrection: “Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4).

That same power gives Paul strength to toil for the gospel (1:29) and empowers other Christians to live lives pleasing to God.

(1) **To endure difficult circumstances.**

It is the power to cope and be content in all circumstances (Phil. 4:11–13), even when we are deluged by suffering. It is, therefore, the opposite of complaining, grumbling, or becoming despondent. When our faith in Christ fails to deliver ease or greater earthly rewards but instead brings persecution and suffering, those who endure do not abandon their faith for something that looks less demanding and more promising. Endurance refers to hanging on during tough times.

(2) **To be patient with difficult people.**

Patience differs from endurance in that it is exercised toward people (see 3:12). It refuses to give in to bitter feelings and to retaliate or strike back when hurt by others.

**D. Pray that they would give thanks to God regularly. (Col. 1:12-14)**

G. K. Chesterton has remarked, “*When it comes to life, the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.*”

*“Gratitude in its deepest sense means to live life as a gift to be received gratefully. But gratitude as the gospel speaks about it embraces all of life: the good and the bad, the joyful and the painful, the holy and not so holy.”* (Henry Nouwen)

Illus: Helen Keller, who became blind and deaf at a very early age, wrote in her autobiography: “For three things I thank God every day of my life: thanks that he vouchsafed me knowledge of His Works; deep thanks that He has set in my darkness the lamp of faith; deep deepest thanks that I have another life to look forward to—a life joyous with light and flowers and heavenly song.” She claimed that so much had been given to her that she had no time to think about what had been denied her.

In 1:12–14, Paul specifies three reasons for “joyfully giving thanks” for what God the Father has done in Christ.

(1) Paul says that God “has qualified [them] to share in the inheritance.”

(2) Paul affirms that God “has rescued” them from the harsh rule of the power of darkness. and “brought [them] into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (lit., “the Son of his love”). Because God loves his Son, all those who belong to him also are objects of divine love.

(3) Paul caps off the mention of the beloved Son with the benefits he has bestowed on us, namely, “redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Conclusion: (Review points of prayer)

When was the last time you prayed like that?