

Sermon for April 16; Lori Lower
Prayer Points from Paul
I Kings 8:54-61
Colossians 1:9-14

I've titled this message, Prayer Points from Paul. I had thought about using Prayer Points Purloined from Paul, but the truth of the matter is that I "purloined" the idea for this talk from another pastor in town, who gave a compelling synopsis of a recent sermon as a devotional at last month's meeting of the Ashland County Ministerial Association. After the meeting, Keith and I told each other that we wanted to use it, but since he had asked me earlier that morning about the possibility of me preaching on this particular Sunday, he graciously conceded to me.

Let's look at the text from Colossians 1:9-14. I'm reading from the New Living Translation.

So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.

I keep an online computer file of Scriptures and quotes about prayer, which I use as a resource when I give Mary the items to put in the bulletin under the Prayer Corner. I had to check if I had included any verses from this passage, because I couldn't remember typing it in there. I was slightly relieved to discover that I had included verse 9 and it had actually been used in June of 2021.

There are many prayers recorded in the Bible, but for some reason, this one had slipped under my radar. But I believe it's worth some careful consideration. In fact, this prayer and the one that Gary read from I Kings are often overlooked. In the most recent edition of Prayer Connect, a magazine put out by the Church Prayer Leaders Network, neither of these were listed in the article series, Great Prayers of the Bible.

I'd like to point out that Paul's prayer doesn't include praying for the physical needs of the people. He's more concerned with their spiritual needs at this point. It doesn't mean that there isn't a time and place for bringing these types of requests before the Lord, and it's certainly an important part of our sharing and prayer time here. What I am suggesting is that perhaps our prayers fall short of what we could or should specifically be praying for. I confess that I tend to only pray when there is a "need," even for my own family members.

The pastor at our ministerial meeting had us pray Paul's prayer over those in our small groups around the tables; silently of course, sometimes pastors' prayers can get a little windy. But it got me to wondering what it would look like if we prayed this prayer for others on a regular basis.

Just a bit of background and context before we get into the meat of the text.

The authorship of Colossians is attributed to the apostle Paul as stated in verse 1 – this “letter is from Paul.” It was written to the church at the city of Colossae, and addresses a primarily Gentile audience. Dr. David deSilva states that “Colossians is written to keep the Christians in that area on course in their growth in discipleship.” He also says that the books of Colossians and Ephesians “give significant attention to how the intervention of God on behalf of the believers shapes their lives and interactions.”

It is interesting to note that Paul had never been to Colossae, which would be located in modern-day Turkey, and didn’t personally know the people in the church. Except maybe for Epaphras who had founded the church and had delivered news about this congregation to Paul while he was in prison in Rome.

Paul gives his usual greeting at the beginning of the book and then offers a prayer of thanksgiving as he celebrates their faith.

However, Paul’s main reason for writing this letter was to warn against the false teaching of the world that was infiltrating the church. The problem seemed to come from combining ideas from other religions and philosophies, with the main elements being Judaism, paganism coming from the Greek culture, and Christianity. So before Paul launches into his main message, he prays this prayer over them; perhaps so that they are prepared to hear and heed his words of warning that are coming later in the letter.

Let’s look at the major points of his prayer. As David deSilva mentioned, Paul is asking that God would intervene on behalf of these believers to shape their lives.

Paul prayed that the people in the church at Colossae would...

Seek to Know God’s Will

In verse 9, Paul prays that they be filled with the knowledge of his will. The Greek word for knowledge used in the NT most often is for moral and religious knowledge. As we discussed in our LifeGroup this past week, knowledge of God needs to go beyond “head” knowledge and toward experiential knowledge – the *experience* of God. God’s will in its broadest sense is described as the whole purpose of God to bless mankind through Christ and the redemption he offers.

In a newly-released book I started reading, *Follow God’s Will: Biblical Guidelines for Everyday Life*, the author states that “simply reading [insert having knowledge of] God’s Word isn’t enough. We also need to know how to apply the Bible’s general wisdom to the specific situations and decisions we face each day. We need to know how to discern God’s will for our lives individually, and we need to find practical, doable ways to follow God’s will on an everyday basis.”

I’d like to dig deeper into this, but for now I’ll list the six general calls on a Christian’s life given directly by Jesus – Love the Lord your God, love your neighbor as yourself, repent, believe in Him, follow Him, and make disciples. This is a good place to start when seeking to know God’s will.

Be Given Spiritual Wisdom & Understanding

The Greek word for wisdom denoting mental excellence in this verse is closely related to the word used for understanding, a mental putting together but adds the power of reasoning.

Wisdom and understanding used here are expressing a single thought, something like practical wisdom or clear discernment. Another commentator states that “spiritual wisdom” is equated with “the practical outworking of moral knowledge.”

Live in a Way to Honor and Please the Lord

This part of Paul’s petition is built on and grows out of the request for knowledge of God’s will, and is a result of knowing God’s desire for one’s life. It is intended to be practical. Live can also be translated as walk. This request also includes the statement that their lives will produce good fruit, which comes out of a right relationship with God.

Honor or walking in the way worthy of (depending upon which translation you are using), is a term used to reflect God’s character and thoughts. It was interesting to me to find that the word used for please or pleasing has the meaning of “giving pleasure of the purpose Godward of a walk worthy of the Lord.”

Learn to Know God Better (or Growing in the Knowledge of God)

The full context of this verse says “you will grow as you learn...” It might be possible to translate this phrase as “growing *by* the knowledge of God.” As plants need rain and sunshine to grow, so is the experiential knowledge of God crucial to the spiritual growth of the believer. This moves us along the path to knowing and becoming more like Jesus.

Be Strengthened by His Power

Power here means force or strength and signifies dominion. Power is used in some translations in verse 13, “from the power of darkness” and the original Greek word used here means authority.

We know that Christ followers are engaged in conflict with what has been described as “the cosmic powers of a darkened world” and that we need God’s divine power to be able to stand against it. Ephesians 6:12 states “For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.” Spoiler alert – I am planning on exploring what it actually means to put on the Whole Armor of God (Eph. 6:10-17) in a future message.

God has an abundant supply of power, which He longs to share with us through the outworking of his Spirit. You may be getting tired of hearing me say this, but one of my favorite prayers is asking to be “infused” with the Holy Spirit and God’s power.

Be Filled with Joy and Thankfulness

Some commentators have debated whether the joy listed here is to be linked with the phrase about endurance and patience or with giving thanks. Maybe it goes with both.

Joy or joyfulness means delight, gladness or cheerfulness. If you receive my emails, you may have noticed this statement about joy in my auto-signature – Joy is the quiet confident assurance of God’s love and work in our lives.

What would it look like to be full of Joy? At the beginning of the year, I shared the song “I’ve Got Joy” by CeCe Winans in a Weds Worship email.

I’ve got joy in the struggle
 I’ve got peace in the storm
 I’ve got strength in the battle
 I don’t fear anymore
 I’m a child of heaven
 And my hope is secure
 I’ve got joy cause
 I’ve got Jesus

As the lyrics state, joy is what should underpin our lives as Christ-followers in any circumstance and is a distinctive Christian quality. I believe that it is important for us to pray for joy in our lives. How many of us know believers who are “joy-less?”

Thankfulness – having just celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus, verses 12-14 gives the ultimate reason for being thankful. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice and victory over sin and death, we can share in the inheritance as children of God. Jesus purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. Giving thanks is to express gratitude. In the word study, I found that thanksgiving is the expression of joy. So these two naturally go hand in hand.

What can **we** take from Paul’s prayer for the Colossians? What would it look like if we intentionally prayed that God would intervene in the lives of our family members and friends?

If the world that the Colossians lived in seems all too familiar to the world in which we live today, then I suggest we take this prayer quite seriously. There are too many competing philosophies and ideologies swirling around us. We need to be able to discern what is from God and what is not, as well as being able to direct our energies to what and how God is calling us to live in this world.

Listen as I read our passage again, this time from The Passion Translation.

Since we first heard about you, we’ve kept you always in our prayers that you would receive the perfect knowledge of God’s pleasure over your lives, making you reservoirs of every kind of wisdom and spiritual understanding. We pray that you would walk in the ways of true righteousness, pleasing God in every good thing you do. Then you’ll become fruit-bearing branches, yielding to his life, and maturing in the rich experience of knowing God in his fullness! And we pray that you would be energized with all his explosive power from the realm of his magnificent glory, filling you with great hope.

Your hearts can soar with joyful gratitude when you think of how God made you worthy to receive the glorious inheritance freely given to us by living in the light. He has rescued us completely from the tyrannical rule of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom realm of his beloved son. For in the Son all our sins are canceled and we have the release of redemption through his very blood.

I'd like to just briefly comment on the Old Testament scripture that I chose for today. I Kings 8:54-61 is also a prayer **for** the people. This was at the dedication of the temple, built by King Solomon. The chapter begins with the Ark of the Covenant being brought to the temple. Solomon gives praises and dedicates the temple to the Lord, but more importantly dedicates the **people** to the Lord. He prayed for God's presence to never leave or abandon them, the desire to do God's will, the ability to obey God's decrees and commands, for help with each day's needs, and for the spread of God's Kingdom to the entire world. Sounds like the prayer in Colossians, doesn't it?

There is certainly biblical precedent for praying these types of prayers. This thought came to me as I was preparing—that we should be “praying for power behind our prayers.”

What I'd like to leave us with today is a challenge. A challenge to use these prayer points from Paul for praying for others.

St. Augustine writes that “Prayer is to intercede for the well-being of others before God.” And that's what I am asking you to do.

In the bulletin, you'll find a card that has today's scripture on one side and a prayer commitment on the other with the prayer points listed. (Thank you to Mary for doing this.) If you're joining us from Zoomland, the insert was attached to the email for today's service.

I'm hoping that you'll prayerfully consider who to pray for – whether daily, weekly, or whatever time frame works for you. Write in their name (or names); maybe you'll want to pray for more than one. You could pray for a different person on each day of the week. You may even want to pray this for yourself. And if the person you are praying for is not yet a Christ follower, just add another bullet point – that they would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

You could put the card in your bible or prayer journal or even on your fridge or bathroom mirror. I believe that we'll see amazing things happen when we start to put spiritual meat on our prayers.

Let me close by praying these prayer points over all of us.

Dear God,

We thank you for the Word which rings true today as it did when it was first written. We thank you for Paul and the impact that he had through you upon the early church.

Praying as Paul did, I pray that we would fervently seek to know your will and that you would give us spiritual wisdom and understanding.

I ask that you would help us to live our lives in ways that honor and please you, all the while getting to know you more intimately.

I also pray that we would be strengthened by your power so that we would have the endurance and patience to carry on until you call us to our eternal home.

And may we be filled with joy and thankfulness that you have called us to be your own children because of your Son, Jesus, who with His blood purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.

I pray that if there is anyone here who does not know you, does not have a personal relationship with you, that they would call on your mighty name and believe in the salvation that comes through your son.

I pray this to be sealed in our hearts, by the powerful name of Jesus.

Amen

BENEDICTION:

From I Thessalonians 5:16-18; I'm reading from The Passion Translation again...

Let joy be your continual feast.

Make your life a prayer.

And in the midst of everything be always giving thanks, for this is God's perfect plan for you in Christ Jesus.

Go in the power and the peace of Jesus.

Remember that the Prayer Corner is available.