

“Learning to Pray: Part 6”

Colossians 1:9-14

Deliver at Central Baptist Church on November 17, 2019

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** We are doing a series on *Learning to Pray*. We are learning to pray by looking at the prayers of the apostle Paul. Here in Colossians 1 we learn how Paul prays for other Christians. Let me ask you, **“how do you pray for other Christians?”** I’m guessing it goes something like this: **“Father, please bless them. Be with them and bless them.”** When my daughter, Jessica, was four she would pray, **“Father, please be with all the people I know and with all the people I don’t know.”**
 - I am not saying that this wrong, but here we find Paul praying more specifically than just **“be with them and bless them.”**
 - Paul keeps asking that God would enable them to keep growing into who they already are.
- Let me show what I mean by this by telling you a story. This story is about the refugee family that we just helped bring to Canada. Because this message is online I will refer to the husband as “Paul” but you know who I’m talking about. Paul gave me permission to share this story.
 - As you know, Paul comes from a country in Africa that is referred to as the North Korea of Africa. Life is very difficult there. One thing that is particularly difficult is the fact that you always have to carry your identification papers. During the day the police will stop you regularly to check your papers. At night there are police on just about every corner. If you forget your papers at home there is no mercy. You are simply thrown in jail where very bad things happen to you. Paul says that everyone lives in a constant state of anxiety and fear.
 - Well that great day came when Paul and his family were qualified to come to Canada on a refugee sponsorship. He and his family left their old life behind and arrived in Victoria on Sept 9th. Paul and his family were free. Their old life was gone and they are entitled to all the rights and privileges that come from being citizens in Canada. But it takes time to unlearn old habits and instincts. It’s a gradual process of learning what this new life is all about.
- For instance, on one of his first nights here, Paul’s two brothers drove him to a 7-11. As they pulled into the parking lot they parked beside a police car. Paul suddenly grew very anxious. He started searching his pockets. In fear he turned to his brothers and said, **“I don’t have my identification papers.”**
 - His brothers just smiled and said, “You don’t need to carry your papers anymore. You are in Canada now. You don’t need to be fear the police like you did in our old country.” Even when they told him this he could hardly believe it.
 - I spoke with him about this again a few weeks ago and he said that he still feels anxiety and fear when he sees a policeman but he is gradually learning what it means to live out his new identity as a Canadian citizen.
- It is the same for the Christian. Look down at verse 13. **READ 13** - ¹³ **He has delivered 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.**

- When you receive Jesus Christ you are rescued out of the old country of darkness and brought into Jesus' kingdom of light. Your old life is gone. You have all the rights and privileges of a citizen in Jesus' kingdom.
 - But it takes time to unlearn old habits and instincts. It's a gradual process of learning what this new life is all about.
- And so this is how Paul prays for other Christians—that they would grow into who they already are as citizens of Jesus' kingdom. This is how we move beyond the “be with them and bless them” prayers.
 - Based on this idea, let me show you two ways you can pray for yourself and others.

MORE FULLY KNOW HIS WILL

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First, since growing into who we already are as citizens of Jesus' kingdom is a gradual process, we must pray that we will know His will more fully.
 - Look at verse 9. **READ 9** – *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.*
 - So the request is that God would fill us more fully with the knowledge of his will—knowing how to live as citizens of our new country and new king.
- When we talk about knowing God's will Christians inevitably think this means discovering God's plan for our lives. Should I marry this person? How many kids should I have? Should I buy this house or a different one? Should I take this job or the other one?
 - The problem comes when Christians treat God's will like a magic 8-Ball. You shake it and see what God says. That can often be a pagan way of understanding God's will. In the ancient pagan religions they were always trying to discover the secret will of their gods. The most popular way was to read the liver of an animal. They would also roll bones, read tealeaves, or track the stars. Today is is the same when people want a clear answer about the future and so they consult astrology, Ouija boards, crystal balls, palm readings, and tarot cards.
 - Christians often use this pagan method to try and discover God's secret will for their lives when they do things like flip open their bibles at random to see what verse comes up. This is not the way the Bible is to be used. So, let's say you want to know if God wills for you to get married. You slip open your Bible and it falls on Hosea 1:1 – **“Go, take to yourself a wife of who is a prostitute.”** Wait, that can't be right! You flip way back in your Bible and look down at Gen 20:12 where it says Abraham married Sarah who was his first cousin. Oh dear! You quickly flip forward in your bible. God, show me if you want me to get married: you look at down at 1 Kings 11:3, **“[Solomon] had 700 wives . . . and 300 concubines.”**
- The problem here is a view that thinks we need a yes or no answer from God about every decision we make and so we make up methods to try and divine his will. There are many problems with this way of talking about God's will but perhaps the largest is that such methods create anxiety filled believers who are always fearful that they have missed God's will.

- Such Christians are also indecisive. They won't act unless they have a clear word from God. They are fearful of doing something wrong and falling out of God's will.
- I want to liberate you from this in order that you can confidently make decisions without constantly second-guessing if things are God's will.
 - You see, what Paul is praying for is not that we might know the secret plans of God for our lives but that we might grow in our understanding of who he is and what his kingdom is about that we can discern what is right and wrong.
- To understand this think about what Paul says in Romans 12:2. **(SHOW SLIDE 3) "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."**
 - So like Paul in my introduction, our greatest need now that we are Christians is to stop acting in the ways of our old life and start living according to God's will. But how do we know what His will is? We need to keep transforming our minds. We need to fill our minds with Scripture – to read it, study it, meditate on it, have it taught and preached to us. And then notice what happens. As your mind is transformed you will be able to discern in each and every situation what God would have you do.
 - Do you see how freeing this is? You don't have to live in anxiety every time you have to make a decision. You live a life that seeks first his kingdom. Then you test your decisions against Scripture. You ask if they make sense. And then you just act.
- This prayer is so important because so many situations we face are not directly addressed in Scripture. And yet we need to make decisions. So, for instance, the Bible clearly says marriage is only for a man and a woman and that a Christian should marry another Christian. That is God's will. But it does not tell you the name of the person you should marry. So how do you know God's will on this? Should you wait for a vision? Should you ask God to reveal his will by praying and then flipping a coin between two different guys? Should you ask God to reveal your future wife by which girl posts next on your Facebook page?
 - Now we can see why this request is so important. We are asking God to fill us with the knowledge of his will and by this he means that we would grow more deeply into spiritual wisdom and understanding.
 - So as you grow in wisdom you learn that not every Christian is right for you to marry. As I often say to my oldest daughter, **"Don't just marry a guy because he says he is Christian. Find a guy who loves Jesus with all his heart."**
- So here we are praying for ourselves and for other believers that we would mature in what it means to be a citizen of God's kingdom. As we do this we grow in wisdom and understanding so that we begin to know how to act in each and every situation. When children are young they need their parents to tell them what to do in each and every situation. The goal of parenting is to help them grow in knowledge and wisdom so that they can make right decisions on their own.
 - So that is how you can pray for yourself and others. We must pray that we will know His will more fully.

LIVE FOR HIM MORE COMPLETELY

- It should be obvious though as we move to the second point that we are not seeking knowledge just for knowledge's sake. We are asking that we would grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding so that we may act rightly.
 - So our second point is this: **(SHOW SLIDE 4) Since growing into who we already are as citizens of Jesus' kingdom is a gradual process, we must pray that we will live for him more completely.**
 - Isn't that what Paul is praying? Look at verse 10. **READ 10** – ¹⁰ *so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.* Our great concern as we pray for other believers is that they might live lives that are worthy of Christ which means lives that they increasingly please him.
- Now do not misunderstand. We are not praying that people would please God *so that* he will forgive and accept them. No. God's favour is a free gift. You cannot earn it no matter how hard you try. All you can do is receive it. If you are not a Christian this morning Jesus says to you, ***"If you will ask me to forgive and rescue you, I will do that. You cannot earn this. It is my free gift to you."***
 - But once we have been rescued from the country of darkness we need to learn how to live as citizens of our new kingdom.
 - And so we pray this request in order that we might know what kind of living pleases our new king and that we might do it.
- That's what he means by ***"walk in a manner worthy of the Lord."*** I like that because walking is so basic. There is nothing special to it. I never see anyone post a status update on Facebook that says, ***"A crazy thing just happened. I just saw a man walking."*** We are asking that God would give us knowledge on how to please him in all the ordinary and commonplace moments of life.
 - And so we are praying, ***"Father we are not always sure how to please you so we ask you would give us this knowledge. Teach us how to please you in the movies we watch, the music we listen to, the way we use our money, and the way we raise our kids. Fill us with wisdom and understanding Father."***
 - What Paul does from here to the end of the passage is to name four areas of life where we must ask God to enable us to know how to please Him. These are four different areas. Don't get lost in the continual changing topics. The main theme here is praying that other believers might live more completely for Jesus. But what does that mean?

BEARING FRUIT

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5) First, ask that we may live more completely for Him by bearing fruit. READ 10** – ¹⁰ *so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work.*
 - Oh to pray this for each other. This is what we pray for others. ***"Make them fruitful Father. May they be effective in sharing Christ with others. May people come to Christ through them. May they raise children that love you with all their hearts."***
 - Pray this for your brothers and sisters.

INCREASING IN KNOWLEDGE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** Second, ask that we may live more completely for Him by increasing in our knowledge of God. **READ 10** – 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.*
 - Paul has already prayed that we would be filled with the knowledge of His will that we might please him. And amazingly what we read here is that what pleases Him is to continue growing in our knowledge of who He is. God wants His people to know Him. And so we pray for each other that we might increase in our knowledge of God.
- Charles Spurgeon said of the great John Bunyan, **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** *“Bunyan has studied the Bible . . . till his whole being was saturated with scripture . . . and his writings . . . continually make us feel and say, ‘Why, this man is living Bible!’ Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his soul is full of the Word of God”*¹
 - And so as you pray for others pray, *“Father, fill them with the knowledge of your will that they would in turn want to grow more into that knowledge. Reveal yourself to this person. Let her see your glory. Increase her knowledge of you.”*

BEING STRENGTHENED FOR ENDURANCE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** Third, ask that we may live more completely for Him by being strengthened for endurance.
 - **READ 11** – ¹¹ *being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.* The older I get the more I see how much we need to pray this for each other.
- We need to pray that we and others would persevere for there are so many challenges. We are children learning to walk. We can easily fall over. We can easily be pushed aside. We need his strength to enable us to persevere.
 - What a gift you give your brothers and sisters in Christ when you pray that God they would be strengthened by His power to be patient and endure.

JOYFULLY GIVING THANKS

- **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** Fourth, ask that we may live more completely for Him by joyfully giving thanks.
 - Look the end of verse 11. **READ 12-14** – ¹² *giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.* ¹³ *He has delivered 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.*
- Do you want to know God’s will for your life? It is to give thanks. As Paul says in I Thess 5:18 – *“give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* And oh what reason we have to give thanks. God has met our greatest need. Our greatest need was to be rescued from our sin that kept us enslaved in the dominion of darkness. And this is what Jesus did.

¹ John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God*, pg 242, note 13.

- D.A. Carson writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** *“If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic, He would have sent an economist. If he had perceived that our greatest need was entertainment, he would have sent us a comedian or an artist. If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, he would have sent us a politician. If he had perceived that our greatest need was health, he would have sent us a doctor. But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death, and he sent us a Savior.”*²
- There is a very interesting story about how 1:13 had to be translated into the dialect of a certain African people. Instead of *“he has delivered us”* it was translated as, *“For he has taken our heads out from the domain of darkness”*
 - What a strange expression. Well, the tribal people had once lived in terrible slavery. To keep them in servitude their captors attached huge iron collars to their necks, which were in turn attached to heavy chains. The people dared not strain to get away because these cruel collars would bruise their throats and choke them. When they were finally set free from their oppressors, the best part was having their heads taken out of those iron collars.
 - Therefore, when they wanted to describe the wonderful spiritual deliverance they had experienced from the awful power of Satan and sin, they could find no better way to express what Jesus had done for them than to say, *“he has taken our heads out.”*
- And more than that look at this fascinating word in verse 12. He has “qualified” us to share in the inheritance.
 - The *New York Times* carried an article where a man said, *“Nobody can ever be sure whether you’re going to heaven. Nobody can ever be sure that you’re worthy enough.”*
 - And yet listen to what Paul is saying, *“If you’re a Christian, you’ve been made worthy. You’ve been qualified.”* There is nothing you can do to make yourself worthy because you are so unworthy of God. And yet on the cross Jesus traded places with you. He took the punishment you deserve. He got treated like a slave. He took your iron ring upon himself that you might go free.
 - What great reason we have to give thanks. This is what pleases God.
- But don’t forget the main point here. Paul has digressed into many different topics but he is still talking about one main thing. The Christian life is one of growing into who we already are as citizens of Jesus’ kingdom is a gradual process.
 - Therefore, when we pray for ourselves and for other we pray that we would know his will more fully so that we could live for him more completely.

² D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 109.