



# Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No.1216-2  
Colossians 1:9-14  
Mark Mitchell  
Oct. 21, 2001

## A Prayer to Grow Up By

The video asks two questions: Do you pray? What do you pray for? Those are good questions to ask. The video also reveals how fuzzy people are on this whole subject. It's easy for us to laugh, but how would we answer the same questions? The first question: Do you pray? Though most of us would answer that we do, this question really asks us about the practice of prayer in our lives. Do we really know how to pray? The second question: What do you pray for? This is where most of us are nearly as fuzzy as those on the video. "Well, gee, I don't know. World peace and happiness. Eternal love and deep connection." I commented last week about the bestseller, *The Prayer of Jabez*. I think one of the reasons that book is so popular is it speaks very specifically to the issue of what to pray for. It's clear that we need some help in this area. We need models. In Col. 1 Paul is a model of prayer. He models how to pray and what to pray for. Look at Colossians 1:9-14,

"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, so that you may 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; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

In these verses we learn some things about how to pray.

### I. The Model of How To Pray

A. Pray with balance: First of all, Paul models for us prayer that is balanced between thanking God and asking God. Last week we saw how he started out in v. 3 saying, "We give thanks to God...praying always for you." It's not until v. 9 that he actually gets around to ASKING God for anything! When Paul prays for churches he always starts with thanksgiving. Phil. 1:3 says, "I thank my God in every remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all." To the Ephesians he says, "I do not cease giving thanks for you

while making mention of you in my prayers" (Eph. 1:16). Even in 1 Corinthians where he is ticked off at the church and has some hard things to say to them he starts out, "I thank my God always concerning you..." (1 Cor. 1:4). It's rarely your first reaction, but when you come to God start by just thanking him. If you can't think of anything, just say, "God, thank you for bringing me here to pray." Thanksgiving is the wheel alignment of the soul; it gets our hearts and minds adjusted to the reality that God IS at work in every situation.

B. Pray without ceasing: Second, pray without ceasing. Paul says since the day we heard of your faith and love, "we have not ceased to pray for you..." You might say Paul was "regular" when it came to prayer. He didn't wait until there was a spiritual 911 to pray. He prayed on good days and on bad days. We don't know how he kept himself at it; maybe he had lists. Maybe he prayed for Timothy on Tuesdays and Philippi on Friday. We don't know, but he kept at it.

He did this despite many demands. We say, "Well, I'm too busy to pray." Don't tell me you're busier than Paul was! Even in prison, where he wrote this, he had plenty of excuses. He had a Roman guard chained to his side 24 hours a day. Like some of you moms of little ones, he never had a minute to himself. He had friends constantly dropping by to seek his advice. He had letters to write to churches and co-workers. He had a ministry going with the Roman guards, many of whom came to Christ. You think you have a lot on your plate! When did Paul find time to pray? I think Paul had special times set aside for focused prayer, but I think he also shot little arrows up to God all day long in the quietness of his own heart. When someone came to mind, like the Colossians, he shot up a prayer. He even saw the interruptions and problem-people in his life as a call to prayer. Have you ever prayed for the guy who cut in front of you in traffic? Have you ever asked God to bless him rather than blast him? That's the secret to unceasing prayer. Every thought, every situation, is seen as a specific call to prayer.

C. Pray in community: Third, pray in community. Notice he says, "WE have not ceased to pray for you..." Paul may have been referring to he and Timothy because Timothy is named as with him in writing the letter. It's interesting that later on in chapter 4 he asks them to pray

for him (4:3). There is a mutuality in prayer between brothers and sisters in Christ. It binds us together. Although at times we pray alone, we are not alone in prayer. If the Spirit prompts me to pray, He has probably prompted someone else to pray the same thing. There was a time in my life when I viewed prayer like playing football. It was all about being a hero. It was all about MY performance. The real stars prayed longer and better than the second stringers. But prayer, like football, is a team sport. When we are weak and cannot pray, someone else fills in.

D. Pray with reflection and specificity: Fourth, pray with reflection and specificity. When we read this prayer it's clear that Paul thought about what to pray for. I'm tired of hearing people say as some kind of veiled reference to prayer, "I'm thinking of you. My hopes and wishes..." What's that all about? I don't mind if you THINK about me, but could you pray for me too! And Paul didn't just say, "Oh God, bless the Colossians." No! he reflected on their situation. That's why he says, "For this reason, since the day we heard of it..." He had heard about their faith, love and hope. Notice the reality of their spiritual growth did not cause Paul to go slack in his prayer for them, but instead it became a catalyst for more informed prayer. It got him excited about what God was doing in their lives and it fueled more intercession. And as he reflected on what God was already doing in their lives, he began to pray very specifically and boldly for growth in their spiritual lives (note "all"). Do you know what our two favorite prayer words are these days? "Just" and "kinda." Listen to most people pray and you will know what I mean ("Lord, I just kinda want to pray for you to bless Bob.") Paul didn't pray like that. When we pray, we should pray should reflectively and specifically and boldly.

But what does that look like? Here's where Paul helps us with the question, what do you pray for? Paul didn't pray for peace and happiness, or for deep love and eternal connection. Notice what he prayed for...

## II. The Model of What To Pray

A. Pray for the knowledge of His will: He prayed "that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in (through) all spiritual wisdom and understanding." This is the content of his prayer, everything else flows out of this. If this can happen, everything will follow. So the chief thing to pray for is to be filled with the knowledge of His will.

What does that mean? We tend to think of the will of God as an itinerary that we must discover. We think it has to do with decisions about what to do and where

to go. Who should I marry? What school should I go to? Which car should I buy? What job should I take? But that's not what Paul means. Nor is Paul talking about the knowledge of facts, even Bible facts. He's not praying for us to stuff our minds with more information. The knowledge of God's will has to do with spiritual insight into God's ways and purposes. It's a perspective on all of life and it's centered in Christ. For the Jew, the knowledge of God's will was embodied in the law. For the gnostic false teachers in Colossae, it was embodied in some secret code only for the initiated. For Paul, the knowledge of His will was embodied in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Once we understand that, we begin to see all of life from his perspective. We see ourselves from that perspective; both our joys and hardships. We see others from that perspective; both our friends and enemies. We see the events of our world from that perspective; both tragedies and victories. In short, we see reality. Without the knowledge of His will our perspective is distorted. We're like people who walk into a fun house and look in the mirrors that make us tall and thin, short and fat, or even crooked. Apart from this knowledge, that's how we view life.

Paul says that knowledge comes "...through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." It's not facts; it's wisdom and understanding from the Holy Spirit. This doesn't come from the natural mind of man; you can't study for this. It's the Spirit turning the lights on in our heart and mind. Of course, in doing that the Spirit's primary tool is the Scripture. You can't have a knowledge of His will without immersing yourself in the Word of God. It's in the Word of God that His Son is revealed and that His purpose is made clear. Healthy babies are regularly hungry. As they grow up, they still get hungry. When they get to be teenagers, they eat you out of house and home. Spiritually healthy and growing Christ-followers will be hungry for the Word of God. The Spirit will open their minds to what it says and time in the Word will be like a satisfying meal.

Why is this so important? Because being filled with knowledge of Him leads to a life style that is worthy of Christ and pleasing to God. That's what he says: "...so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects." What we know (spiritually) impacts how we live. Don't miss the progression. You don't start by trying to change your lifestyle. You start by understanding His will. Have you ever asked someone who upset you, "Who do you think you are?" That's the right question. We instinctively know that bad living flows out of bad thinking, especially bad thinking about ourselves. But when we have His perspective, our walk begins to change. We walk worthy of Him. That doesn't mean we ARE worthy of Him, but it means our walk begins to reflect the fact that we belong to Him. It's like if one of my kids is going out the

door and I say, "Don't forget who you are! Act like a Mitchell." It's like our name means something and we want to walk in a way that is worthy of that name. When we do this, it pleases Him. Isn't that great? That's what children want to do. They want to please their father: "Look Dad! Look at me! Did you see me? Did you watch?" He does watch and it does please Him.

B. Pray to grow up in Him: Have you ever wondered what would it look like for you to please God in all respects, to live a life worthy of His name, to really grow up in Him? Well, this is the second thing Paul prays - for them to grow up. He didn't pray that God would FIX their problems; he prayed that God would grow them up so they could FACE their problems. I'll tell you what, I love babies, but I'm so glad my children didn't stay babies. Babies are a lot of work. They expect everyone to serve them! Someone said, "A baby is a digestive apparatus with a loud noise at one end and no responsibility at the other!" Scripture likens new Christians to babies. We love and welcome these babies, but we all look forward to them growing up. But what does that mean? What does that look like? Paul tells us.

Bearing fruit in every good deed: First, it means "bearing fruit in every good deed." As people who are steeped in grace, we can forget that God's grace shows itself in our lives through good works. We're not saved by good works, but without good works our salvation is worthless. You can say, "That's an apple tree," but if there are no apples, how can you be sure? You can say, "That's a Christian," but if there is no Christ-likeness, how do you know? I hear people say, "Well, my son made a decision for Christ ten years ago, but he hasn't really been living it out. You know, he sleeps around, he gets wasted on the weekends, he could really care less about being with other believers and reading the Word. But he's a Christian. He's going to heaven. He's just carnal." I want to say, "You're right, he is carnal. It sounds to me like he's a carnal unbeliever!"

Hold your place here and turn back for a minute to Eph. 2. Most of us know vv. 8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one should boast." We like that. That fits our theology. But we need to go on to v. 10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them." He crafted us for good works. As a matter of fact, he arranged them beforehand for us to walk in them. You ought to go through your day looking for those things God arranged beforehand for you to do.

My son and I went to get our hair cut recently at Supercuts (I'm a big spender!). When they called my name, I walked up to the lady and she sat me down in her chair and she looked seriously angry. I wouldn't have been so concerned if she wasn't a very large woman with a pair of clippers in her hand! I said to her, "Are you okay? Are you sure you want to do this?" She said, "I'll do it, but I'm not okay." I said, "Why not?" She said, "I just found out that my two favorite uncles both have cancer. They live in Minnesota and I can't go see them." I said, "Wow, that must be so hard." We talked for a bit, and then I just said to her, "I couldn't live through something like that without God." (Of course, I waited until she put down the clippers to say that). She said, "I know. I couldn't get through this without God." Before I left, I said, "I'll pray for you." Big tears welled up in her eyes. My son and I walked out. He said to me, "What happened?" I said, "I don't know but God just did something. Let's pray for that lady." What did happen? I walked into something He prepared beforehand. I didn't do it, but I would have had to be blind not to see it. Growing up in Christ means walking into good deeds.

Increasing in the knowledge of God: It also means we're "increasing in the knowledge of God." Here we are back at knowledge again. That's not a mistake. Here's how it works: The knowledge of God's will results in bearing fruit in good deeds, and bearing fruit in good deeds results in increasing ever more in the knowledge of Him. Just like sin is a vicious cycle that leads us downward, knowledge is a virtuous cycle that leads us upward. As we obey we get even more knowledge and insight into Him. Understanding will fuel holiness, and holiness will fuel more understanding. This is a fundamental law of spiritual growth. The upward spiral only stops when we stop obeying what He's already shown us.

Increasing in the knowledge of God is what makes the Christian life exciting and adventurous. We'll never know all there is to know about God, but we can increase in our knowledge of Him. How could we possibly ever be bored when that is what life holds for us? God is the most captivating, exciting, surprising person you could ever get to know. He's always full of fresh ideas and possibilities you never thought of. To know Him means you're constantly turned on because you see His hand in everything: in nature, people you run into, trials and challenges you face. I've been a Christian for 27 years, and I still remember the day about 25 years ago I learned this adventure of knowing God was even more exciting than serving God. I picked up a book by J.I. Packer called *Knowing God*. In it I read this quote of Charles Spurgeon:

"It has been said by someone that the proper study of mankind is man. I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father."

Those words forever changed my perspective on the Christian life. I had been so busy trying to serve him I had stopped getting to know Him. I was God's slave but I wasn't God's friend. Growing up in Christ means we increase in the knowledge of God.

Strengthened with all power: Thirdly, it means "being strengthened with all power..." Notice it's not our power which strengthens us, it's His power ("according to his glorious might"). Growing up in Christ is not about mustering up all your own strength; it's about Him giving us His resources to face things we could never face on our own. This is why we don't pray for the removal of difficulties in our lives. It's those situations we can't handle that force us to look to God for strength. We could never know the strength of God unless we had things and people in our lives which we couldn't handle on our own.

One summer, a man took his four grandchildren fishing. At age three his youngest, Joshua, was very active. So Grandpa kept saying to him, "Now you have to sit still and be patient." Joshua kept saying in his antsy way, "I am being patient, huh, Grandpa?" When strangers walked by he'd say, "I am being patient." After about an hour, the children's Uncle Will came by. Joshua handed him his pole and said, "Here, Uncle Will, you be patient!"

Paul says God strengthens us for the purpose of "steadfastness and patience." Steadfastness means to hold your position in battle; to hang in there; to sit still when under pressure. It has to do with tough circumstances, while patience has to do with difficult people. Moses was steadfast as he faced the overwhelming challenge of leading Israel out of Egypt. But Moses lacked patience in dealing with the people when they grumbled in the wilderness, and he lost the right to enter the Promised Land. Do you have difficult people in your life? People that test your patience and push your buttons? Don't try to handle them yourself. You'll either turn too passive or too

aggressive. Turn to God. He'll give you patience. You won't withdraw from them or write them off, but you won't blow up either. He'll give you the strength to stay in their life and love them and speak the truth to them.

Joyfully giving thanks: The amazing thing is, He gives us joy in the process. This is the last thing he mentions about growing up: "joyfully giving thanks to the Father..." Joseph Stalin said that gratitude is a sickness suffered by dogs. In contrast to that, G.K. Chesterton said, "When it comes to life, the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude." For believers, joyous gratitude is basic to growing up and pleasing God. It's more than just a happy feeling, it's a choice we make. That's why it's a command in the NT. It all depends on what you focus on. Do you focus on what your world says you need to be satisfied? Or do you focus on what God has done? We are given several good reasons to thank God here, all rooted in what God has done for us.

First, he qualified us for a future inheritance that is filled with light. You don't have to qualify for heaven; He has already qualified you. Second, He rescued us from the domain of darkness. You and I were under the power of darkness. We were locked in a dungeon of sin, but He came and rescued us. Third, He transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son. And fourth, He redeemed us. He purchased our freedom from sin's penalty and power. These are things that can never change, so I always have a reason to thank God. I always have a reason to have joy. That's why David could say, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is my strength and portion forever" (Ps. 73:26). That's why Job could say, "I know that my redeemer lives!" (Job 19:25). That's why Paul and Silas could sit in a prison and sing to the Lord.

## CONCLUSION

This is what it looks like to grow up. It starts with being filled with the knowledge of His will, and that leads to a life that pleases Him in every respect, a life that is growing up in Him, bearing fruit, increasing in knowledge, strengthened with power, and full of gratitude. That's what the church needs today, not just more babies, but more who are growing up in their faith. But none of us could do this on our own. That's why this beautiful picture of the Christian life is set in the context of a prayer. It's God who works these things in us. It doesn't matter where you're starting from. He can make you this kind of person. It starts by asking. As we depend on Him and yield to Him He will work these things in us.

© 2001 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA