

## Why Pray ...? Colossians 1:9-14

Paul is thrilled to bits when he sees the deep work of grace in the hearts and lives of these folk in Colosse. He is overjoyed because it reinforces his solid commitment to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ - it proves that the gospel works. It's fascinating when we realise that Paul's input into their lives was greater than he probably ever imagined; he'd never met them, but his influence was massive. Even now, as he prays for them, we would be foolish to downplay its huge significance - when he touches the throne on their behalf, he's in the process of securing God's blessings for them.

That's what true prayer is all about. There are two elements to what Paul says in this section: there is petition in verses 9-11, and there is praise in verses 12-14. Right here, Paul answers the question so many people are asking today: why pray?

It's good to pray for one another - we need it, and others need it as well. The bottom line is that God answers prayer! In fact, the Bible is replete with examples of God's people engaging in a ministry of intercession:

for example, Job prayed for his so-called friends; Moses prayed for Aaron; Samuel and David both prayed for Israel; Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel all followed suit; Hezekiah and Nehemiah prayed for Judah;

Jesus prayed for his disciples; the Jerusalem church prayed for Peter when he was behind bars; Paul prayed for other believers - some of them he knew, many he didn't.

That's what prayer does - it helps us lift the lid on a most important ministry, and it's one of those jobs that all of us can do.

It's obvious from verse 9 that Paul excelled in this role - this guy must have had some prayer list; it doesn't matter what epistle you read, Paul prayed for the people in that church. This preacher man knows what it is to seek the Lord's face, to storm the gates of glory, to pour out his heart in adoring worship and faithful intercession. When Paul said he would remember so-and-so in prayer, that's precisely what he did. Some of us are all talk - but this guy is action man when it comes to doing business with God on his knees. For Paul, it meant he kept short accounts with God; the lines of communication were always open. The preacher lived with a real awareness of God's presence, he was conscious of the nearness of God in every circumstance - that's the secret to a successful prayer life and ministry.

Paul isn't only God-conscious, he is also people-conscious. It seems to me, there's no way we can effectively pray for people if we are not aware of their needs. It's like walking into a shop, it helps when we know what we're asking for.

Paul's prayer recorded in these verses is a precious legacy to us and to every generation of believers - apart from anything else, it reveals his heart and gives us a super model to emulate. You would be hard-pressed to find a better example of how to do it.

Paul's all-consuming passion for the Christians in Colosse is expressed in verse 9 with the words that God would fill them 'with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.'

The phrases that Paul employs here are not exclusive to the church in Colosse; he repeats them so often in his other prayers - that would

indicate that this is the bedrock of the Christian life, the foundation of a life lived in fellowship with Christ.

It's about knowing God today, and knowing him better tomorrow - there's a progression, a deepening, in our relationship with the Lord. In situations like this, ignorance is not bliss.

The word 'fill' has the idea of being totally filled to overflowing - no shortage, no shrinkage. It has the idea of the cup of our life being filled to the brim, even to the point of some flowing over the edge. At the same time, it means we will be totally controlled by what is in us - it will be our guiding light, our get-up-and-go!

That's what a clear knowledge of God's will is all about - there is nothing airy-fairy or mystical about it. God has revealed it to us in Scripture, it's there for all to read and take on board.

If we want to know what God's mind is in a particular situation, then we need to come before the Word with an open heart and mind and allow God to guide us by his Holy Spirit. That he will do, as he has promised.

There's nothing secretive about knowing God's will - in fact, it will be our food and drink if we're really serious about growing in our Christian life.

When we familiarise ourselves with the will of God, that in turn leads to 'spiritual wisdom and understanding' - too many of us want a quick solution to life's challenges and problems; well, the reality is, there ain't one!

The man is a fool if he tries to circumvent the revealed will of God - if he chooses to go down that dodgy road, he's on a slippery slope and one that spells big trouble.

'Wisdom' means we will be wise as to what God would have us do in a given situation - 'understanding' means we get on with it. The

principles we learn need to be applied to everyday life - that's where 'wisdom and understanding' work in close harmony with each other.

As we submit ourselves to the Word of God, slowly but surely its truths will permeate our thinking and colour our outlook on life. We'll not even be aware of it at times - until we are called to respond to a particular crisis or face a mega challenge, and we just do it.

You see, that's where our hearts become like a sponge, soaking up biblical truth at every opportunity - we are immersed in the precious Word of God; that's where your life and mine learns to filter everything through the grid of God's unchanging truth; in other words, we have become men and women of the Book, we are those who live and work by the Book.

That's a marvellous prayer for us to pray for others, for our pastor and elders, for new believers, for our family, for ourselves - it's one of those prayers that we can start to answer right away!

So, when we are aware of God's big plan for our lives, what is the net result? Well, that's what Paul spells out in the next verse or two - actually, there are five purposes that become a reality in our lives when we know the will of God.

First, he wants us to have a worthy walk. That means there is a link between what I know to be the mind of God and how that will shape my conduct in the real world. The only way for me to please the Lord is for me to be what God wants me to be, there is no shortcut, no other way - this is the royal route to knowing the Lord's blessing. This is one of Paul's hobbyhorses - he has a lot to say about it elsewhere in his epistles. For example, in Ephesians 4, 1 Thessalonians 2, and

Philippians 1. You see, he wants nothing but the best for us - and if we are to secure the choice blessings of God, then we have to pursue God's plan and do things his way. There is no Plan B, no alternative route for us to follow.

The second factor is living a fruitful life; Paul yearns at the end of verse 10 that we 'bear fruit in every good work.' This is what it's all about - there's no need for us to be barren in our relationship with Christ, we're talking here about vitality and productiveness.

Jesus was singing from the same page in John 15, that great chapter on the vine and its branches - if I'm going to be fruitful then I need to be united with Christ in the vine.

The third telltale sign is one of growth - we'll not be standing still in our spiritual experience, nor will be back-pedal, there is no stagnation or staleness in our hearts - there's a fervency and a freshness, just a real sense that we're on the up. The green shoots are sprouting in our lives and they will be evidenced by a growth in our love combined with a faith that is enlarged. We'll be stretching saints, reaching out for more and more of what the Lord has for us.

The fourth token is strength, that's what Paul refers to in verse 11 when he writes that we will be 'strengthened with all power according to his glorious might.' The Greek word that Paul used here for strengthened is a present participle, that signifies continuous action.

In other words, our God is not like a booster rocket giving us an initial boost of power and then leaving us to fly on our own. We are strengthened day by day - there's no power surge with him, it's more of a steady current 24/7. The phenomenal power that is available to us is nothing less than the limitless power of God himself.

Paul refers to the Lord's 'glorious might' - well, that says it all, doesn't it! There is no lack when it comes to God's ability - he is omnipotent, he is a can-do God, a hands-on God. He never has a power cut, nor is he ever in danger of not having enough energy to keep going - he is power personified.

Number five in Paul's list is the essential quality of endurance - he longs that we might have 'great endurance and patience' in all the ebb and flow of life. He's looking here for stickability, stamina, he wants us to be in it for the long haul. This is no Saturday morning park run, it's not a 10k run, this is a marathon, and still some.

We're not talking here about a stoic kind of smile in the midst of all life's pressures, it has nothing to do with gritting your teeth and standing up in the hour of severe trial - Paul speaks of us being able to endure all the hassles and hurts of life with a perseverance that only grace and God are able to supply.

And he wants us to do it with a smile, for that's where joy enters the equation at the end of the verse! It's only as we know the Lord that we're able to cope in the day of crisis.

It's what Winston Churchill said to the young folk in Harrow College on their graduation day - 'Never give up. Never give up. Never give up. Never. Never. Never.' To me, that's the spirit that Paul longs for us to embrace and value in this section - it's always too soon to quit when it comes to us following Jesus.

Some prayer, and he's not finished yet! In part 2 of Paul's prayer for the church in Colosse, he makes much of the quality of thanksgiving. Too often we whinge and whine about this, that, and the other - we're quick to condemn and criticise;

all too often we're much too slow when it comes to saying 'thank you'.

It would do us good if we were a touch more thankful in our intercessions - the fact is, we owe it all to him, we are deeply indebted to him, we have absolutely nothing without him.

Above all, we can and should be grateful for our salvation - that's what Paul focuses on in verses 12-14; three things are a matter for much praise: one, our inheritance; two, our deliverance; and, three, our transference.

What about our inheritance? Paul speaks of it like this: 'giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.' There's so much packed into that one sentence ...

God is only our Father because we are trusting him as his sons, we have been brought into a living relationship with him - before we knew him, he was our Judge, now he's our Father.

He's the one who has 'qualified us' to share in his kingdom splendour and he's done it through the finished work of Jesus at Calvary. Before we trusted him as Saviour, we were outside the family of God, we were far away, we were out in the cold, now it's all so different! We're in, and we're there to stay - he made a way when there was no way! We're in the light, we're in the Lord.

Our inheritance has our name attached to it - it's a bit like your suitcase with the label on the handle! It's yours, and it's going to no one else.

This is something earmarked for our future - eternity in heaven with the Lord and his people. What a day that will be!

That's what he is preparing us for right now - one day we shall pass beyond the stars, and when they have burned themselves out, we will shine even brighter. It has zero to do with us, nothing

at all, it has everything to do with him. All the credit goes to him, and to him alone!

See what he has done for us in verse 13 - he has 'rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves' - that's salvation in bold, capital letters! He has delivered us from the clutch of the enemy; he has lifted us from the sinking sands of sin and planted our two feet on the eternal rock of ages.

No wonder we sing unto him a new song, no wonder we give him all the praise and honour: he's the one, the only one, who could do it!

From darkness to light, from death to life - what a momentous achievement, and it's all because of God's amazing love and boundless grace. We have jumped ship; now we're safe in God's lifeboat.

We were going down and under, now we're bound for heaven and home - we're on the up! Our lives are now lived in a totally different realm, a brand new world, as it were.

Says Paul, that's where we used to be, this is where we now are - and the focus is very much on Jesus. He is the One the Father dearly loves and he's the one in whom we have 'redemption, the forgiveness of sins.' Jesus did for us what no one else could do for us and what we could never do for ourselves.

We've been purchased from the slave market of sin, now we're free, forgiven! Bondage is a thing of the past, now we're a liberated community. The shackles are gone, we're walking on air, there's a spring in our step and a twinkle in the eye - we're on the Lord's side!

The thrilling fact is that God has taken our sins, every single one of them, and he has sent them away, he has banished them and they will never be found again. They are removed from us as far as the east is from the west, said the Psalmist. He

has buried them in the depths of a fathomless ocean ... wow, that's grace! That's God.

No wonder Paul exhorts us to give thanks to the Lord for all that he has done on our behalf. We owe everything to him, we are debtors to mercy and to God. Let's give him the glory and all the praise for, as the song says: Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe, sin had left a crimson stain, but Jesus washed it white as snow!

This is what God has done, and he's still actively working in each of our lives, he hasn't finished with any one of us yet - when he is, we'll be safe on the other shore, enjoying the bounteous beauty and blessings of eternity itself. Even there, we'll be all eyes when we see the King in his incomparable splendour.

Jesus, then and now, is the centre of attraction. To me, that's the prime reason why we bow in thanksgiving and lose ourselves in wonder, love, and praise. Put simply, that's why we pray!