

“FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S WILL.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

January 1, 2023, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Colossians 1:9-14

Introduction.

When you pray for someone else, what do you usually pray for? When you ask someone to pray for you, what do you usually ask them to pray for?

It is safe to say 80-90% of our prayers are for good health, recovery from sickness, for the needs of our children, for a good interview or meeting, for help with a test at school, for favor with an application, for machines to work right, safety on a trip, for a spouse, for children, for material things. Our prayers are earth bound, material or physical in nature.

How many of our prayers sound anything like Paul’s prayers? How many of our prayers reach for the heights or dive to the depths for spiritual wisdom, knowledge, maturity, discernment?

Try to imagine if someone you know told you they were praying for you and then told you they were praying these words we just read. Put yourself in the sandals of the Christians in the church in Colossae and you just heard what the Apostle Paul was praying for you?

Would we like our prayers to line up with God’s desires? Do you ever find yourself wanting to pray for others but feeling stuck, like you don’t know what to ask?

Without ceasing.

When Paul says he has not ceased praying for these things, he is saying there are some things for which we must never stop praying, some things for which we must pray over and over again. There are blessings from God we need constantly. If we only ask for them every six months we will not see fruit or change. We want to learn the power of persistent prayer.

Let’s notice what Paul earnestly asks God to do.

Colossians 1:9-12

This is a prayer inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore answered by our Heavenly Father. I am calling us to pray for First CRC corporately and each other individually asking the Father in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit to answer this prayer. Think with me about how we can pray this prayer for each other.

If you noticed our text is one sentence. It begins with one main petition, followed by the reason and the marks or signs of that reason.

What to pray for, why to pray for it, how to do that.

1. To fill us with the knowledge of His will

Paul's Holy Spirit inspired prayer request to the Father on our behalf is that we would increasingly be filled with and grow in our knowledge of the divine will of God.

God is the greatest truth, and to increase in the knowledge of Him is the greatest pursuit.

Pray for a hunger and thirst to know Him the way the Psalmist does in Psalm 42 and 63.

Psalm 42:1-2 As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Most of us when we hear the phrase "the will of God" think in terms of ourselves, our future, our spouse, our vocation, our needs, wants, desires. When the Bible talks about the will of God, it has more to do with obeying what God has already commanded.

This is not so much about finding God's will, but about doing His will that we already know. To know God is to know what He loves, what He hates, what He wants.

Pray we will know God's will, love God's will, put God's will above our own wills.

2. Through all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

This presses on, deeper, higher. Not just knowledge of God's will, but spiritual wisdom, spiritual insight, spiritual discernment, spiritual understanding.

Spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding come from the Holy Spirit.

It is spiritual wisdom and understanding in contrast to the world's wisdom, to pluralism, to relativism, human traditions. What kind of wisdom influences you most, what you get from cable news, social media and TV and movies, or what comes from the knowledge of God through His Word, from the pagan culture or from Jesus Christ?

Who seeks to think God's thoughts rather than the world's thoughts? This is the sort of thing for which we must pray. Ask God to give our children and grandchildren spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding to discern what is worldly and what is godly.

3. In order that, we may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord

Now comes the reason for Paul's petition. So that, in order that we may walk worthy of the Lord. What a high standard, how do you walk worth of a king, the King of kings, the most high and holy being in creation?

This is achieved only by prayer, prayer for this desire, and prayer for attaining it.

Paul presses on deeper and higher. Not just knowledge, but action. Not just good knowledge, but a good life.

How do we walk in a manner that shows we have been filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding? We do this by not living according to the flesh, but according to faith, by renouncing our own will, our own ways, our own pleasures and seeking God's will, ways and pleasures.

When we pray this for others, children, friends, church members, we are asking God to intrude in their lives in such a way that they desire to honor Him and change their behavior and motives.

4. Full pleasing Him in every way

Do you ever think this way? You are in the middle of some situation, some relationship, do you think about whether what you are saying or doing pleases the Lord or would it bring shame on Jesus?

Is how we talk to our spouses, our kids, our friends pleasing or displeasing to Jesus? Is what we watch on TV or screens pleasing, edifying, or shameful?

Paul's definition of fully pleasing God is turning from our selfish ways and desires and tuning our lives to faithful obedience to Him.

Pray this for those you know who are struggling with sin. For children who are being selfish, rebellious, giving into temptation, pray they will desire to please God. To do this will take spiritual wisdom, knowledge of God's will, much prayer.

If you want to please someone what would it help you to know? Their likes and dislikes. Pray that you will be enabled to please the Lord in your thoughts, your words, your actions, your reactions, your attitudes.

Paul now describes in more detail what living a life that is pleasing to the Lord looks like. Pleasing the Lord is marked by four things.

5. Bearing fruit in every good work

Growing in fruitfulness, good works.

A good fruit tree is worthless if it doesn't produce good fruit. Like the old slogan, where's the beef? Like the motto of Missouri, show me. The proof is in the pudding. Don't just tell me what you believe, show me what you believe. Good words need to be followed by good works.

This is the work of the Spirit.

What fruit is your life producing that is good, that is building the kingdom?

Pray for our children, our students to seek opportunities to do good to others, for others. Pray for our interactions with each other, that they will be good works.

6. Increasing in the knowledge of God

Growing in knowledge of God's will pleases the Lord.

Are we teachable? May we have an eagerness to increase in knowing God.

May God make us willing and ready from now on to increasing our understanding of God until the day we die.

Are we ready to learn, to grow, to understand? We must always see ourselves as students of God. Will you take time this year to grow in your knowledge of God through reading His Word?

7. Being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might,

Growing in strength to have power for endurance and patience.

In all these prayer requests Paul is saying we won't make any progress in our own strength, but only by the Lord's help. Apart from Him we have nothing and can do nothing, but only in His strength.

We must prayerfully take hold of God's power for our calling, for our trials, for our good works. In our infirmity, God aids, provides, enables. God's enabling grace.

His powers is all we need to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, and to please Him and to bear good fruit. His power is sufficient for all our weaknesses.

We all need strength, strength for the daily tasks, challenges, strength in the face of temptation, in the face of a mean person, strength to be Christ-like in a very un-Christlike culture.

Everything about the Christian's life requires supernatural strength, the Spirit's enabling. This is gained through prayer. Pray this early and often for our children, for each other.

8. So that we may have great endurance and patience

Growing in patient endurance pleases the Lord.

Living the Christian life requires endurance, resilience, because life doesn't go as planned, doesn't go the way we want. Sometimes life hurts, hurts bad.

But it always goes as God planned, so we must pray for strength to have endurance and patience. We must pray for knowledge of His will and submission to it.

We need this mighty power and strengthen for whatever trials or suffering lay ahead for us. Strength to endure, strength to persevere, strength to bear patiently.

Patience is the evidence of an inner strength, impatient people are weak. Impatience is selfishness. Are we easily angered, are we quick tempered, are we hasty in our judgments?

Patience is related to contentment, which is to be pleased with our lot received from God. Pray for endeavoring to persevere patience, uncomplaining patience, even long-suffering patience, patience that goes the distance, the kind that gives great endurance. Marathon patience, not sprint patience. The kind that endures for as long as it pleases God to cause us to suffer.

Pray for each other that we will be patient with each other. Pray for our children who frequently find it hard to control impatience.

9. Joyfully giving thanks to the Father.

Growing in joyful gratitude to God.

This too pleases the Lord, Christians joyfully giving thanks to the Father, having a heart of gratitude. Not just patience but joyful patience, that is a sign of God's strength in us enabling us to please Him.

Pray for each other's joy. Pray for our children's joy.

This joy is grounded not in the present, but in the future and in the spiritual, not the physical.

Why pray this way? Because of who God is and what God has done.

He has qualified us, delivered us, transferred us.

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.

Implications and application.

We must come away from Paul's prayers with a clear sense of our powerlessness before God. We are utterly and absolutely powerless to justify ourselves, to sanctify ourselves, to love, trust, have faith, grow, pray, to do anything at all, apart from God. We must pray.

Prayer is the sound made by an powerless, empty, blind, foolish soul talking to the utterly powerful, sovereign and sufficient God. It is the sound above all sounds that most pleases God.

Prayer is music to His ears. He delights in it. It is sweeter than any other sound, sweeter than works, sweeter than preaching or teaching or serving.

Paul stretches us, challenges us, to pray differently than we usually do. Will you take this to heart, will you seriously consider changing your prayer life, what you pray for yourself, for your family, your spouse and children, your friends, your church and fellow church members.

I invite you and urge you to join me in praying this prayer and using this prayer reminder card to press in further up and further in, may we become deeper Christians and a deeper church. Let's pray bigger things for ourselves, for our spouses and children, for each other, for our church.

Prayer is the key to our life, to our blessing, to our families blessing, to our churches blessing. It is our most important work. One evidence of that is when we get to an age when we can't work like we did, we can still pray. God gives us this most important work to finish out our life.

Prayer: Colossians 1:9-14 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, 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; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father.