

Continuing in Prayer for One Another's Faithfulness Campbell Baptist Church (01/26/2025)

Don Whitney, author of the classic book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, asks and answers a couple of penetrating questions regarding the all-too-common problem we seem to have with prayer:

Since prayer is talking with God, why don't people pray more? Why don't the people of God enjoy prayer more? I maintain that people—truly born-again, genuinely Christian people—often do not pray simply because they do not feel like it. And the reason they don't feel like praying is that when they do pray, they tend to say the same old things about the same old things.

When you've said the same old things about the same old things about a thousand times, how do you feel about saying them again? ... Yes, bored. We can be talking to the most fascinating Person in the universe about the most important things in our lives and be bored to death.

As a result, a great many Christians conclude, "It must be me. Something's wrong with me. If I get bored in something as important as prayer, then I must be a second-rate Christian."

Indeed, why would people become bored when talking with God, especially when talking about that which is most important to them? Is it because we don't love God? Is it because, deep down, we really care nothing for the people or matters we pray about? No. Rather, if this mind-wandering boredom describes your experience in prayer, I would argue that if you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit—if you are born again—then the problem is not you; it is your method.¹

John Piper agrees. He says, "If I try to pray for people or events without having the word in front of me guiding my prayers, then several negative things happen. One is that I tend to be very repetitive. ... I just pray the same things all the time. Another negative thing is that my mind tends to wander."² Have you experienced a

¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 11-12.

² John Piper, "Should I Use the Bible When I Pray?" article dated 28 September 2007 [<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-i-use-the-bible-when-i-pray>] ac-1

wandering mind or boredom in prayer? Perhaps what you need is to pray with the Bible open in front of you, guiding you. Whether it's the psalms, the Lord's prayer, or the prayers of the Apostle Paul, we can be helped as we approach God's throne in prayer so that it's not boring but, rather, engaging, encouraging, life-giving even. In fact, our text for this morning records what the Apostle Paul prayed for the faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. From the day that he first heard about their faith, "we have not ceased to pray for you," he says. How could Paul keep praying for this congregation that he had never met personally? Let's look at his prayer together and find out. If you haven't done so already, please open your Bible to Colossians chapter 1—that's on page 983 of the pew Bible—and follow along with me as I read verses 9 through 12. That's Colossians chapter 1 verses 9 to 12. Hear, now, the word of the LORD:

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, 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, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

My aim is simple since our time is brief. I want to survey Paul's three principal prayer requests here so that we might, as Carson suggests, "align our prayer habits with his. We want to learn what to pray for, what arguments to use, what priorities we should adopt, [and] what beliefs should shape our prayers."³

And Paul's first request is that the Colossians might be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

Perhaps this is something that you often find yourself praying for yourself: "Lord, I want to know your will. I want to know who I

cessed 22 January 2025.

should marry or what jobs I should apply for or whether or not I should buy this house or this car or what church I should attend now that we're moving to a new city." As D. A. Carson says, "Very frequently we are inclined to use the expression the will of God to refer to God's will for my vocation or for some aspect of my future that is determined by an impending choice." But this is misleading, he says, and "perhaps even dangerous, for it encourages me to think of 'the Lord's will' primarily in terms of my future, my vocation, my needs—and that is often another form of self-centeredness, no matter how piously put. Worse, it expunges from my consciousness the dominant ways in which the Bible speaks of the will of the Lord [namely as something I need to do not something I need to discover]."⁴ Psalm 143 verse 10 says, "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God!"

To be filled with the knowledge of God's will, then, is to be filled with a knowledge of what God would have us do, of how he would have us live. First Thessalonians 4 verses 3 to 6 say, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor ... [and] that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because God is an avenger in all these things." First Thessalonians 5 verse 16 to 18 similarly say, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Paul prays that the Colossians would be filled with a knowledge of God's will. Why?

Verse 10 tells us. Paul prays that they would be filled with a knowledge of God's will "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." Isn't that what we want too? Don't we want one another to be pleasing to God, to live lives in a manner worthy of the Lord, to bear fruit in every good work? I know I want that. I want that for myself. And I want that for you, my church family. And so, what do I need to do? I need to pray that you, my brothers and sister in Christ, might be filled with a knowledge of God's will.

4 Ibid., 101.

And how is the Lord going to answer this prayer? He's going to answer it by getting you into his word. That's where we grow in our knowledge of God and of what he wants us to do with our lives. Maybe you started a Bible reading program as part of a New Year's resolution but you're wavering now in your resolve to continue. A prayer or two from your brothers and sisters in Christ might be just the thing the Lord uses to keep you motivated to continue reading. Or maybe you'll provide that prayer for another brother or sister who needs to be strengthened or motivated to be in God's Word. I use that word strengthened because of where Paul goes next.

His second prayer request is that the Colossians would be strengthened with all power.

Paul wants the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will and to be strengthened with the power of God's glorious might. Do you see that there in verse 11? "being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience." Paul wants the Colossians to be strengthened so that they might endure. Endure what? Anything and everything. That's what "all endurance and patience" is meant to signify. This includes trouble, hardship, danger, sword brought by those who hate my Lord, slander here or no reward. It includes difficult people just as much as it includes difficult circumstances. And we can't do that on our own. We need divine strength in order to endure these things, which is exactly what Paul prays for. He prays that the Colossians would be strengthened with all power, according to God's glorious might. We saw Paul expand upon this thought in his prayer for the Ephesian believers in our Scripture reading for this morning. There, Paul prayed that the Ephesians might know "the immeasurable greatness of [God's] power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:19-21).

This is the kind of power that we can pray God would strengthen both us and our brothers and sisters in Christ with so that we all 4 might endure.

The same power that rose Jesus from the grave
The same power that commands the dead to wake
Lives in us, lives in us
The same power that moves mountains when He speaks
The same power that can calm a raging sea
Lives in us, lives in us

This is the kind of thing that Paul had in mind when he prayed that the Colossians would “be strengthened with all power, according to [God’s] glorious might.” And I pray the same for you, knowing that these are difficult and trying days, knowing that we face pressures from within and without to be faithless, to turn away from the Lord and to follow after the course of this world. Those who were baptized this morning told you that what the world has to offer is nothing but empty promises. Jesus, on the other hand, delivers not just forgiveness, not just freedom from guilt and shame, but eternal life in heaven with him. And so, I pray that you would be strengthened with all power for all endurance.

And I pray that, among other things, for your joy. That’s where Paul goes next.

He prays that the Colossians might know joy, joy in the midst of their suffering.

Look, again, at verses 11 and 12: “being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” As Richard Phillips notes, “Paul knew personally of joy in afflictions, such as on the occasion when he and Silas were beaten and cast into jail for preaching the gospel. They did not respond with glum resentment. Instead, Luke records, ‘About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.’”⁵ Knowing, then, what it is to have joy in the midst of suffering, Paul prays that the Colossians might know the same so that they might give thanks to the Father who qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. This final phrase looks forward to heaven when we will receive that “inheritance that is

5 Richard D. Phillips, *Colossians & Philemon in the Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2024), 32.

imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4).

Indeed, it is this promise of sharing in the inheritance of the saints in light that enables us to have joy in the midst of sorrow. Think about it. One day, you and I, sinful and undeserving though we are, will inherit the light of life. We will walk before God in that light (cf. Psalm 56:13) and he will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things will have passed away (cf. Revelation 21:4). From that vantage point, we will be able to look back on our lives and say that it was worth it all, every hardship, every trial, every ounce of suffering we experienced in this life will be transformed into eternal joy. John Bunyan captures this well in his classic, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. After describing the many spiritual trials that Christian faced in this life, Bunyan writes of how Christian was summoned to cross the final river. The passage was fearful, but Christian and his companion left their mortal garments behind as they crossed the waters and saw on the other side a fair city with its golden gate. When Christian asked the shining messengers who were sent to greet him what he would find in the Celestial City, the angels answered: “You will receive the comfort of all your toil, and have joy for all your sorrow; you will reap what you have sown, even the fruit of all your prayers, and tears, and sufferings for the King by the way (Gal. 6:7, 8). In that place you must wear crowns of gold, and enjoy the perpetual sight and vision of the Holy One; for ‘there you shall see him as he is’ (1 John 3:2).”⁶

What a thought! We will have joy for all of our sorrows. All of our prayers and tears and sufferings will bear fruit for eternity. It will be worth it all. And so, we can say along with the Apostle Paul,

Through [Christ] we have ... obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:2-5).

6 John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995), 168.

Do you have the kind of joy and hope in the midst of suffering that Paul prays the Colossians would have? You can. The key is obtaining access by faith in Christ to the grace of God in which believers stand firm. Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ, the God-man, came to earth to live the perfectly God-pleasing life we could not and then to die the death that we deserve for all of our sins against him. Three days later, he rose again from the dead, demonstrating his power over sin, death, and hell. And now, the invitation is open such that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but, instead, have everlasting life.

With the assurance of everlasting life in heaven with God, how can we not know joy even in the midst of trials and suffering? And yet, we are human; we are weak; we are frail; we are prone to be faithless even though he remains faithful. And so, we need to pray for one another. We need to pray that we would be filled with the knowledge of God's will so that we might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. We need to pray that we would be strengthened with all power to persevere in faithfulness to the end. And we need to pray that we would know joy, joy in the midst of our sorrows so that we might give thanks to God as we should even when days are dark. So, let's do that, shall we? Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I ask that my brothers and sisters in Christ here at Campbell Baptist Church would be filled with the knowledge of your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that they might walk in a manner worthy of you, fully pleasing to you: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in their knowledge of you. I pray, as well, that they might be strengthened with all power, according to your glorious might, for all endurance and patience and with joy; giving thanks to you, who has qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Do these things, Lord, I pray, in Jesus' name.

