

Sermon: Growing Up

Text: Colossians 1:9-14

Introduction:

As we turn our attention this weekend to Colossians 1:9-14, we find the Apostle Paul encouraging this newly established church in Colossae (it was only about 5 years old) with the news that he was constantly **praying** for them. Here was Paul, sitting in prison in Rome, telling this small little body of believers that they were in the forefront of his mind—and at the very TOP of his prayer list! Wow!

In a moment, we're going to take a deeper look at precisely what Paul was praying—and why. But before we do, I think it would be good to think more generally about prayer. Prayer can be easy during the good times, but it can be challenging during difficult times. Admitting this can be a difficult thing, but for many it is true. We have a lot of questions regarding prayer. Does it make any difference? How should I pray? How does God hear all of the billions of prayers around the world—and sort them all out?

We have many different reasons to pray. We pray because we want to thank God for the beauties and glories of life. We pray because we feel small and helpless and sometimes afraid. We pray for forgiveness, for strength, and for assurance that we are not alone. Millions in AA groups pray daily to a Higher Power, begging for help in controlling their addictions.

The very word prayer comes from the Latin root "*precarious*" – a linguistic cousin to precarious. In other words—prayer is rooted in a cry for help! It's interesting, though, that quite often prayer becomes little more than telling God what we want Him to do...combined with thinly veiled hints on how we think others should behave.

Why do you think it is that prayer ranks so high on surveys of theoretical importance (I know I ought to pray) and so low on surveys of "actual satisfaction" (I'm not sure what difference prayer makes)? For the skeptic, prayer is a delusion. A waste of time. To the believer it represents perhaps the most important use of time. The British pastor Martyn Lloyd-Jones summed up the confusion: "Of all the activities in which the Christian engages, and which are part of the Christian life, there is surely none which causes so much perplexity, and raises so many problems, as the activity which we call prayer."

At its core, prayer is nothing more and nothing less than connecting and communicating with God. In the same way that we need communication in our human interactions—we also need to communicate with God. And in spite of all of our questions, prayer doesn't just make A difference, prayer makes ALL the difference. Prayer changes us, and aligns our hearts with the heart of God. Prayer also moves the hand of God. Jesus straight up said: "You don't have because you don't ask!" In the same way that a parent welcomes the humble and genuine requests of a child—God welcomes our humble requests. With that in mind, let's take a deeper look at what Jesus taught us about prayer, as well as the way that Paul prayed for the church in Colossae—prompted by his deep desire for them to grow up in their faith.

Examination:

- Read **Luke 11:1-13**

- Have you ever noticed that the thing that prompted the disciples to ask Jesus about prayer is the fact that John the Baptist had “taught his disciples” how to pray? What do you think John taught? (We have absolutely no idea—but it’s still an interesting question to think about)
- What words and phrases does Luke not include in the Lord’s Prayer that Matthew does (Matthew 6:9-13)?
- What is the point of the little story that Jesus tells in verses 5-11? Are we being instructed to pray with “shameless audacity” (according to the NIV translation)?
- In what ways is praying much the same as “asking” “seeking” and “knocking”?
- Why do you think Jesus compares prayer to the heart that a good and loving father would have toward his children?
- Verse 13 seems to throw a real curve-ball (as in—I didn’t see that coming!). Jesus doesn’t promise that the Father will give us everything we ask for in prayer. What we DO receive is the Holy Spirit! What do you think about that? How might the gift of the Holy Spirit be the best possible answer to any request we might make in prayer?

- Read **Colossians 1:9-14**

- In verse 9, Paul begins this new paragraph by stating “For this reason…” we have not stopped praying for you. According to verses 3-8—what is that reason or those reasons? In other words, why is Paul praying for them?
- Paul indicates that he began praying for the believers in Colossae the very first day he heard about them (from Pastor Epaphras—see vv. 7-8). Do you believe that is true? Do you believe that Paul’s immediate response when learning about this young church was to pray for them?
- Verses 9-12 give us quite a list of things that Paul is praying for. Verse 9 describes three things that Paul wants them to be filled with. What are they?
- Verse 10 begins with “so that”. This indicates ACTION. What behaviors does Paul want to happen as a result of them being filled with knowledge, wisdom and understanding? (This is not a simple question with a simple answer. Paul mentions numerous things that he wants to see happen. Take some time to list each one, and give some thought as to why Paul would be praying for these things to happen in the life of every believer)
- What, according to verse 13-14, has Jesus done for us?
- What do you think Paul means when he talks about the kingdom that we have been brought into? Is this just the “eternal kingdom” (heaven) that we will one day inherit? Or is this life in God’s kingdom TODAY as we live out our time on earth?

Application:

This prayer by Paul is not just pie in the sky. It is truly POSSIBLE for God to fill us with the knowledge of His will—and wisdom and understanding that the Holy Spirit gives. In what ways do you need God’s wisdom and understanding? Ask Him—believing He will give it to you!