

## Complete: Pray & Pursue – Colossians 1:9-14

If you were to drop the Apostle Paul into 21<sup>st</sup> century America and start taking him to sporting events, which is of course the first thing I would do, there's only 1 sport that he would recognize as being pretty much the same as in his day, running.

I'm sure he would have been interested in what happened this past week at the US Half Marathon championships. In races like this they have a lead car, which guides the elite runners along the designated course route to ensure that they don't take a wrong turn. Jess McClain was leading the women's race by a substantial margin with about a mile and a half to go. Since she was in the lead, she was following the lead car and the lead car turned off the course route and took her about a minute and a half down a side street and off the course.

3 other runners followed her and by the time they turned around and got back on the right course, they had fallen behind without a chance to catch the new leaders. Jess ended up finishing 9<sup>th</sup> and may end up missing representing the US at the world championships.

I have no doubt that if Paul watched this unfold, he would have questions about the lead car and he would be shocked to see women running that fast, but he would also use this situation as an example for the Christian life. Once you are on the course, you have to continue on the course to the finish line. Paul is writing to the Colossians because they are being tempted by false teaching to swerve off course. He began this letter by thanking God for the gospel's work in them. Listen to 1:3-6.

Now, in verses 9-14 he's going to pray specifically for them that this gospel work in them will continue. Look at the beginning of verse 9. You can see how this takes us back to verse 4 and how Paul originally heard of God's work in them. Now he prays for that to continue and that they won't follow the false teaching off course.

So, what you have in verse 9-14 is a list of what Paul prayed for the Colossians. This reveals what Paul thought most important for them. He asked God to work in these specific ways. He records this for them so that they are encouraged by the

fact that he's praying for them and so that they can pursue the same things that he's praying. So, in Colossians 1:9-14 here's what we will see. **3 Requests to Pray and Pursue.**

### **1. To Know (v. 9)**

Look back with me at verse 9 to see Paul's main request for the Colossians. Notice the words, knowledge, wisdom and understanding. All of these relate to knowing. Remember from Colossians 1:5 that the gospel is the word of truth.

You will often here people say that Christianity is not just a religion of the mind. We don't just want a head knowledge. That's true, but if you don't have truth planted in your brain then the rest of this can't fall into place. The outline of the racecourse that we are running is determined by certain truths about God, Christ, and the gospel. You see this when Paul says that he wants the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

Paul wants the Colossians to be saturated and filled to the brim with the knowledge of God's will. Let's be clear, God's will does not refer to some specific plan for your life this week that is unique to you. For example, you will hear people say something like, "I'm trying to determine if it's God will for us to buy this house." There may be biblical principles that help you determine whether or not to buy the house, but God's will doesn't refer to that unique decision. Instead, God's will refers to God's purposes and plans for all of Creation and for His people in salvation. God's will is the story of redemption as revealed in Scripture. One author put it like this: *What Paul has in mind is not some particular or special direction for one's life (as we often use the phrase "God's will"), but a deep and abiding understanding of the revelation of Christ and all that he means for the universe (vv. 15–20) and for the Colossians (vv. 21–23).* – Douglas Moo

Paul prays that the Colossians would be filled with this knowledge and that it would include wisdom and understanding. Wisdom in the biblical sense is the ability to use knowledge to make good decisions, and understanding is the capacity to grasp circumstances and see things for what they are.

We fill our minds with so many things. Political arguments, sports statistics, and funny cat videos. There's a place for each of these, except maybe the cat videos, but we have the opportunity and privilege to saturate our minds is God's story. And Paul understands that real knowledge of God's salvation story leads to our next request.

## **2. To Walk (v. 10a)**

Let's read verse 9 again and this time go into verse 10. Knowledge is never meant to stay knowledge. It's not meant to get trapped between your ears. Wisdom and understanding of God's purposes and plans will transform our behavior.

To walk is a common biblical metaphor for the way you live and act. I have a watch that keeps track of the number of steps I take per day. They say that a healthy person will reach 10,000 steps a day, every day. They didn't need to keep track in Paul's day because walking was a way of life. They weren't sitting behind a desk staring at a screen. They had to move and walking was moving. Walking was living.

Notice the manner of the walking that comes from the knowledge of God. It's a walk that is worthy of God and pleasing to Him. We have a dog. She is a terrible and lovely creature. She loves taking a walk with us more than almost anything, except that time I dropped a pound of freshly grilled salmon on the ground. But she is not a good walking partner. She pulls on the leash, wants to stop and sniff every fire hydrant, and she cannot emotionally handle seeing other dogs. She gets way too excited. Her walk does not match our walk.

This is close to the idea here. When you are filled with the knowledge of God's will, your way of life will be suitable to God's desire for you. Your walk will match His. You will be in step with Him and will be pleasing to Him.

To be pleasing to Him doesn't mean you have to constantly earn His favor by the way you walk. Think of it this way. How excited do we adults get when a baby takes his or her first steps? But are they good at it? They're terrible at walking. I mean, come on, they have to hold onto stuff and they're always tumbling on their bums. But it is awesome because we are loving parents and we know what to expect of children.

Listen, I have no doubt this morning that some of you are barely walking spiritually speaking. You are tumbling and bumping into things and often smashing your face into the ground. God is not an austere taskmaster; He's a gracious Father. He delights in your stumbling walk. He delights in the way you are trying to take the knowledge of His will and translate it into daily life. Don't look up and see a frown. Look up and see a compassionate Father. Psalm 103:13-14.

And then let your knowledge of your compassionate Father propel you forward to continue to walk and to continue to grow in specific ways.

### **3. To Grow (vv. 10b-14)**

So far we've seen that our knowledge of God's will directly shapes and motivates our daily walk or lifestyle before God. But what does this walk before God look like?

Well, let's go back to the baby who is just learning to walk. That child will not continue to stumble along and fall down every few steps. That child will start to figure it out and begin running and then climbing. Eventually that child can catch a ball while running or do gymnastics and it's amazing thing to watch that once stumbling toddler turn into an adult human being. I've always taken the tactic with my kids that I do not allow them to beat me at sports or games. This way, when they can beat me one day they will know they have grown and accomplished something.

Paul spends the rest of his prayer laying out specific requests for how he wants to see the Colossians grow. And that's really the driving force behind verses 10-14. It's growth and change. Let me read these to you and look for this emphasis on growth. There are 4 areas of growth in these verses. I'm going to point them out to you and then briefly walk you through them. 1. Bearing Fruit. 2. Increasing. 3. Being Strengthened. 4. Giving Thanks.

Bearing fruit and increasing go together and you can clearly see that these tie back to Colossians 1:6. The gospel is working and Paul wants that work to continue in the Colossians in their daily walk.

The gospel is not something you simply hear and believe the moment you first come to faith in Christ. The good news of the gospel is everything for the growing Christian. *We never “get beyond the gospel” in our Christian life to something more “advanced.” The gospel is not the first “step” in a “stairway” of truths, rather, it is more like the “hub” in a “wheel” of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C’s of Christianity, but it is the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.* – Tim Keller

Notice the way this growth in the gospel feeds your knowledge of God in verse 10. So, you are filled with the knowledge of God and this shapes and forms your walk or behavior. And then as you bear fruit and grow, your behavior or walk feeds back into your knowledge of God. You have to know the basics of golf to be able to swing a golf club and start playing the game. But the more you play the game, the more your knowledge of the game increases.

Third, Paul wants them to grow in their strength to face difficulty. But this power isn't something they generate themselves. Look at verse 11. God's power strengthens us for endurance of difficult circumstances and patience with difficult people.

Finally, Paul wants them to grow in their giving of thanks. This might seem a fairly trivial practice, but notice what they are giving thanks for. Verses 12-13. God Himself has fit you are qualified you for an inheritance. The image behind the language of inheritance and transfer from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son is the Exodus of Israel in the OT. The Promised Land was their inheritance and God rescued them from slavery and darkness in Egypt and brought them safely into the land.

Of course, Israel's deliverance was a type and picture of what would come through Jesus Christ. Notice what we receive in Christ's kingdom. Not land but verse 14.

Giving thanks to God is a necessary part of growth for the believer. Giving thanks is tied directly to the recognition of God's grace. You give thanks when you realize you have been shown grace and given grace. Most of us are not thankful because

we fail to appreciate the grace we have been shown in Christ. But when you regularly express gratitude to God it orients your mind toward grace.

So, these are Paul's requests for the Colossians. To know. To Walk. To Grow. But they aren't just items on a prayer list. Throughout Colossians Paul will pick up language from this prayer and exhort the Colossians to pursue growth in these areas. For example, listen to Colossians 2:6-7. The same is true for us. Pray these items for one another and then pursue them by God's grace in your own life. Let's pray.

### Sermon Reflection Questions – 3/8/26

- What are common ways we are tempted to swerve off course in the Christian life today?
- What is the relationship between Colossians 1:3-8 and 1:9-14?
- What does it mean to be filled with the knowledge of God's will?
- How does wisdom relate to knowledge and understanding? (v. 9)
- What's one area of scriptural knowledge you would like to grow in?
- How does our walk relate to the knowledge of God's will?
- How would you describe what it means to be pleasing to God? What does this not mean?
- What does it mean that the gospel is the A-Z of Christianity and not just the ABC's?
- How does giving thanks relate to grace?
- Why do you think it's so important that we continue to grow in our thankfulness to God?

