

On a day like today, that's a nice little reminder, isn't it? Spring is coming like it does all the time. Just God's faithfulness. We see it. Cold days like this.

By the way, I don't know what Alan said before. I was out doing some last minute greeting, but I'm proud of you guys. Look at you, turn to one another and say, hey, good job. You guys are like, tough, tough. I mean, I get paid to be here, you don't.

So good job. I appreciate you being here. We're in a series called all things new. The other day I was in the kitchen and one of the boys walked in and he looked on the kitchen door frame. He goes, what's this?

And there were some little lines marked and some letters there. Now, any grandparent perhaps, or parent knows what those lines signify. Anyone want to hazard a guess?

Little growth chart there. They measure someone's growth. Maybe you have them on your kitchen door as well. They indicate maybe another year older, certainly a couple of inches taller. Maybe they indicate in some way increased maturity, life experiences for the person making the mark.

There's probably some bittersweetness attached to that. Yeah, the little kids are growing up, but they're going to move out soon. Or the kids are growing up, but they're going to move out soon. I won't ask which side of that spectrum you land on, but growing up, not necessarily moving out. God's got a place.

He's preparing for us to live with him forever, so he doesn't want us to move out, but he definitely wants us to grow up, doesn't he? Visions 210 says this, we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. God desires that we grow up and mature into the people that he created us to be. And so in the process, he is in this process of creating us anew.

And that's sort of the theme of this series we're in. God is making all things new. Now, you may be here this morning and go, yeah, some days I feel it, some days I don't. But I will tell you this in my own life. Spiritual growth is not exactly like physical growth.

Physical spiritual growth doesn't require me to get new shoes or longer pants or larger pants. It can be hard to see spiritual growth unlike physical growth. But today's passage from Colossians will tell us a little bit what that spiritual growth looks like. And Paul's prayer, which is what we're going to focus on his prayer for the Colossians will give us some insight into what we should be praying for, ourselves and others that are in our care and in our purview. So I'm going to have you turn to the book of Colossians and we're going to be in chapter one this morning.

We're not going to wander too far afield. Colossians, chapter one. I'm going to pray and we'll dive in. Okay, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the way that you are growing us.

You're changing us. You're transforming us. We're learning new things about ourselves and the world around us. You're broadening our experiences. You're bringing new people and new things into our lives, all so that you can shape us into the people that you've called us to be.

It can be scary. So, Lord, we pray for your wisdom and your spirit to lead us. And then today, as we open your word, we pray that your spirit would speak to us from your word. Challenge us, encourage us, grow us up. In Jesus name.

Amen. So if you're in Colossians chapter one, you can look at the first couple of verses there and you'll see some familiar texts. We looked at it last week. Paul introduces himself and he commends himself to the Colossians and he says, listen, I've heard of you. The good word that epaphras brings back.

Timothy and I are praying for you and we are so thankful for you, is what he says. He says, we're thankful that you're part of our family. You are our dear faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. We're thankful for you and we're thankful for your faith and your hope and your love. And the fact that because of this faith, hope and love being lived out in this little town of Colossa, the kingdom is growing there.

You're the reason because you're living it out. You're being faithful, you're being hopeful and you're being loving because God loves them, because Paul loves them. He says, I'm going to pray something for you that will indicate that my desire is that you continue to grow in these things. And here's what Timothy and I are praying for you because we, like God, want to see some scratches, some marks on the door indicating that you're growing in this faith and this hope and this love. And so here's the prayer that he makes for them.

This past week, I got a chance to meet up with an old friend and I was catching her up on my life and things are going there. And she just stopped right where we were. And she prayed for me. And when she prayed for me the way she prayed, I'm telling you what, I wanted to cry a little bit because it was just so impacting and she just poured out her heart and my life before God and it was so encouraging. So when we read Paul's prayer to the Colossians, this is the kind of prayer I suspect they responded the same way I did.

Here's what he says. Colossians one, nine through 14. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, what a good day that was. Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. He loves them.

He is praying for them all the time. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all wisdom and understanding that the spirit gives so that you may live a life

worthy of the Lord. What an interesting phrase. Living a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way. That's very aspirational, isn't it?

Bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience and giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. Amen. It's a good prayer. It's a good prayer, one that we can pray for ourselves and we can pray for others.

So in this prayer, Paul reiterates again, I love you guys. I want to see you grow. I want to see progress in your spiritual walk. I want to see the kingdom advance in you and through you and around you. And so he begins by praying for this renewing, a renewing of their minds.

And the way he phrases this indicates that he knows that they've been living before according to the thinking of the world. How many of us do that? We live in this tension, don't we, between the thinking of the world and the renewal that God has for our minds. And he prays, this is his father. Fill them with the knowledge of your will.

Have you ever tried to discern God's will for your life before?

I love to travel. Many of you know that before I travel, I love to pull a map out and just see kind of where I'm going and where I'm going to arrive at and where I'm going to end up at and the points in between that I want to see. And I look at the map and I try to map my route out to sort of figure out what this thing is going to look like, what do I want to do and how am I going to do it? And sometimes we approach discerning God's will. Like we try to discern how we're going to get through a country that we've never been to.

But that's not really how we discern God's will. That's certainly not the way that we really grow in the knowledge of a country or a new place. A map is a great place to start. It gets us here and helps us understand the direction we're going to take to get there. But we don't fully understand God's will.

Simply by stick with me here, opening up the Bible and pointing to a verse and saying, lord, show me your will. Bam. That's not the best way to discern God's will. Can anyone try that before? That's not the best way to do it.

Here's what happens. The best way to experience and really know a country, a new place is by being there and being in it. The very best way is to be there with someone who lives there, who knows it, who knows the culture, they know the language, they know the currency, they know the terrain, they know the best way to get from here to there. They know the best foods to try. They know the best restaurants to go to.

They know the best way to experience this country you're living in. I say ignore the top ten list. Let me show you how to be here. The same is true when we are discerning the will of God. The best way to do it.

Now, again, we absolutely look at the terrain. We pull out the map, we pull out God's roadmap, we learn the country before we jump in. We learn God's will. But I'm telling you, random verses are not the way to discern God's will for your life. Jesus says, here's how you discover the kingdom.

You discover God and his purposes. He says, follow me, follow me. He calls disciples to do that. Says, follow me. I know this place.

I know this country. I drew the map. I will teach you the language. I will teach you the laws and the customs of this place. Begin by opening God's word and begin to trace out what matters to Jesus.

Begin to trace out the thoughts and the words, the motivations of his heart, and then obediently follow him and he will lead you through this place. So Jesus says, stick with me and you will know, not just as a third person, from a third person's perspective. You will know, not just by sort of looking at a map and trying to figure out things. You will know in ways that you cannot know in any other way what it is to live in the knowledge of the will of God by following Jesus. That's how our minds are renewed, by following Jesus when we're truly following Jesus, pleasing him in every way, as Paul prays that they will do.

Pleasing him in every way isn't the natural outcome of just following Jesus. He says, if you abide in me and I abide in you, man, you're going to live in the place where I want you to live. Now, I know that there's a few out there saying, okay, well, what about the rules? When the boys came to live with me the first night, Mason said something like, okay, what are the rules? What are the boundaries?

Goes, I like boundaries. I like the, and I'm like, hmm, I hadn't really thought about rules yet. You just live here for a while and we'll see what the rules are. God definitely has some boundaries. There are some things he wants us to do and things he doesn't want us to do.

And Paul will get there in his letter to the Colossians, but let's stick with his pace and we'll get there as well in this series. But for right now, we just know that God loves us. He's brought us into this new kingdom. He say, follow me, and I will teach you the knowledge of my will. You will not just know of it, but you will be in it.

And then he prays for a renewal of their lives. So their minds are being renewed as they follow Jesus and just learn his ways and his thoughts and his values. He says, prays for a renewal of their lives. This is where he says this. You're going to bear fruit in every good work as you grow, in the knowledge of God, as you're growing, as you're walking with Jesus, you're going to be bearing fruit.

Fruit is how we describe the outcome of when God is working in us and through us and around us. So when we're following Jesus where he goes and joining him in what he does and doing what he asks, then the outcome is fruit. Some fruit is internal. We are changed and transformed. We're different people.

We're growing up. There's internal marks on the kitchen doorpost, but some fruit is external. We can see around us that things are changing the friendships we have, the connections we have, the places our life is taking us is different than it would be if we were still walking according to the way the world thinks. That's external fruit, but all of it's fruit. All of it is a result of God working in us and through us and around us as we depend and trust in him.

This is where Jesus says this, John 15. He says, I'm the vine, you are the branches. And he who abides in me and I in him, you will bear much fruit if you don't. You can't do anything. You can do nothing, Jesus says, so abide in me.

Stick with me, follow me. One of our values here at Sherwood Oaks is that we want to be Christ led influencers. We want to be impacting the world around us because of the influence of Jesus working in us and through us and around us. So the more we trust and obey him, the more he can trust us with his own kingdom goals. And when he can trust us to trust him, one, our knowledge of him will increase.

We're just going to spend time. We're going to learn more about him. This is how we know God, by the way. So if you remember, I think it's Philip. Yeah, Philip asked the question, show us the father, Jesus.

Show us the father. And Jesus says, Philip, come on. I have been with you for so long and you still don't see the father. If you've seen me, you've seen the father. You know God.

You grow in the knowledge of God by spending time with Jesus. Are we catching the theme here? At this point, following Jesus means inviting him into every moment, every decision, every emotion. If you're married, this is sort of like a spouse. You're learning this person, you're learning their expressions, you're learning that look in their eye.

You're learning the placement of their shoulders when they're stressed and when they're not. Now, there's always some mystery, but as you spend time with this person and you're paying attention, you're learning things.

You learn what delights them, what frightens them, maybe.

And eventually you are able to think like them. You know them well enough that you can say, this is how my spouse would think or react. Jesus says to Thomas, listen.

He tells Philip, if you will be intentional about watching me and learning from me, doing what I ask you to do, prompting, when I'm prompting you to simply obey. If you do this, then you will begin to know me and you will know God in ways that were not possible before.

Jesus is going to take us places that we would probably not go on our own. I'll just be honest with you. God has taken me places that I would not have gone if I did not sense the absolute hand of God on my shoulder saying, this is the way you need to go. Walk ye in it. So to do that, to be obedient to Jesus, even when he's taking us places where we don't really want to go, is going to require a third renewal.

And that's the renewal of our strength. And what does that mean? Well, that simply means, as Isaiah said, that those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They're going to soar on wings like eagles. They're going to run and not grow weary.

They're going to walk and not be faint. They're going to be able to do more and last longer and accomplish things that they cannot do on their own. And the things that I would resist but trust anyway. God says, I will sustain, protect and uphold you. When I think about the power of God, the strength of God, the might of God, I go back to my pentecostal roots in that context oftentimes.

And if you were raised pentecostal, you know this. And you know I speak from a place of deep affection and appreciation for my heritage. But sometimes the power of God is reserved exclusively for things like an exorcism or casting out something or healing, a miraculous healing or, I don't know, you name it. Sort of the feeding of the 5000 where you put yourself in a place where something miraculous is going to happen because the power and strength of God is going to move through you. And Paul prays that the power and strength of God would move through the Colossians as well.

But not quite that way, at least not exclusively that way. He says this here is how the strength of God matters. In verse eleven, he says being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience. Not so you can do miracles and cast out demons and name and claim whatever you want to name and claim. Not so you can open deaf and ears or open blind eyes.

Not so you can deliver yourself from bad circumstances or difficult people. That would be great, wouldn't it? If that's how the power of God was demonstrated in our lives, that life just got easy because of the power of God. But that's not what Paul says. Paul says the strength of God, his glorious might, is being birthed and born and moved through you so that you can endure, you can patiently endure, as Isaiah says, to run and not grow weary, to walk and not grow faint, because this is the truth.

I love this. I think they've got this up here. God's strength gives us the ability to stick to it when he doesn't miraculously deliver us from it. If you're going through something right now that just seems unbearable, I'm praying that God will strengthen you according to his

glorious might, that you may have great endurance. Connie Clifton, here at our church, one of our deaconesses, her name is Connie, her full name is Constance.

It's an old word meaning sort of the steadfastness, this stick to itiveness. It's a beautiful name and a beautiful idea. And that's what Paul is praying here for these Colossians. Paul's praying for them to be steadfast, to be faithful in their endurance, to be patient as they endure. But you don't need any of that.

If God is always miraculously delivering you from stuff, you only need it when God says no. This is something I want to take you through, but I'm going to be with you through it. But when we stick with it, even in difficult things, in difficult circumstances, with difficult people, that's how we are experiencing God's mighty power in us. Paul's prayer for the Colossians is a prayer for all of us, isn't it? A prayer for our minds to be renewed so that we begin to think like God thinks for our strength to be renewed, so that we no longer are depending on the force of our own will and our own might for our lives to be renewed, so that everything we do matters, good things, fruitful things are happening because of our intentional obedience to Jesus and walking with him through difficult times.

And when we do this, we find that we bear much fruit. We please God in every way. All things are being renewed. And somewhere I believe God is making some marks on that door. He says he's preparing a place for us.

So maybe when we get there, we'll see some little marks on the door. Ah, look, here was Jeff in 2020. Here is Jeff in 2023. Good job, Jeff. Good job, Tim.

2023 was a rough year, but look, Tim started here and now Tim is here. He's moving, he's, he's growing. I want to hear that. Well done, good faithful follower of Jesus. The last bit of this passage in Colossians verses twelve through 14 really leads us into this time of communion.

Here's what Paul writes. And giving joyful thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people. In the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves and whom we have. Redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Redemption, the forgiveness of sins. The past is taken care of. It's done with. We don't have to go back there again. So this passage is.

There's a lot there. It may be helpful to work through it a little bit backwards. Jesus, the son God loves, has, through the work of the cross, redeemed us. What does that mean? He's pulled us out of the kingdom of darkness, this place of destruction, the dominion of darkness.

Paul says, this is a place that we were in. This is the place we lived in. This is the place we knew. This was the place that sort of formed and shaped us, who we were before. He's taken us out of that place and said, I want you to be in this new place where that is over with.

You don't have to go back there. That's done. Its power is finished in your life. All that stuff forgiven, all that stuff forgotten. That cycle of evil and destruction that exists.

And guys, I'm telling you, I live a pretty easy life. And for those of you who are new to faith, I'm going to tell you there will come a point where the kingdom of darkness is not quite as impactful in your life because you live in the kingdom of light. And that over there is something for God to deal with. But I walk with Jesus over here. But sometimes when we are following Jesus, he brings us right up here to the borderland and we get to look over there and we get to see how dark and oppressive and evil that dominion is when you see it.

One, you're thankful that you don't live there anymore. And two, it gives you a whole new appreciation of the people that God loves that are still living there and still in that. Paul says, I'm so thankful that we don't live there. We give thanks because God has rescued us from that and brought us over here, and we live in this new place now where that has no power over us. Not only has he forgiven us and erased all that stuff that happened over there, he has now brought us in here and he's elevated us to the stature of sons and daughters.

We are co heirs with Christ. Do you understand that? That means that everything Jesus has, we have as well. So what does that mean? That means that Jesus is perfect and we are being made perfect.

The scripture says we will be perfect. He reigns. The promises that we will reign as well. He lives forever. We will live forever, too.

He's healed and whole. And we will be healed and whole. That's a grand inheritance. Now, I've not seen your grandma's china, but I'm telling you, it stacks up pretty good against your grandma's china. It's a great inheritance.

It's a grand inheritance, and it's ours if we follow through in that invitation that Jesus extends to us. If you've never accepted that, today may be the day to do it.

If you have, we're going to share in a time of communion. So we're going to pray with Paul as we prepare for this time.

Father, fill us with the knowledge of your will, holy spirit, give us your wisdom and understanding so that we may live lives worthy of the Lord, so that we may please you in every way.

May we bear fruit in every good work. May we grow in our knowledge of God. May we truly know God, not just know about God. May we find our strength in your power and not our own. And may we have great endurance and patience because life is hard and following you is challenging.

And so, Jesus, we want to lean on you. We want to hold fast to your hand. You will see us through, God. May we live lives of joyful gratitude to the one who has qualified us to come to this table right now and share in this meal as a preview of the meal that we will share in eternity. Thank you for rescuing us from the dominion of darkness, the kingdom of evil, and bringing us into this new place, this kingdom of the son you love, the kingdom of Jesus.

Thank you for the redemption, the forgiveness of sins that we have in him.

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