

2. The best prayer for us

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For several years many of the people I know have been coming to me to ask me to pray for them with some sort of indication that I have a special connection with God. Now that I am a pastor, I see the same kind of request more often.

Don't get me wrong, I don't mind praying for others at all. As a matter of fact that I'd love to pray for our people and I believe that it is my honor and privilege to pray for them. But I don't want people to think that I have an extra pull from God because I am a pastor. We all have the same opportunity in Christ. Because of His atoning sacrifice, all the born-again Christians can pray from equal level at the feet of Jesus.

Since I don't know what they exactly need from the Lord, I pray to the Lord that God would grant them His will in their lives. I cannot go wrong with that request. Of course, if I know what they need, I would pray for that, too.

In my opinion, the portion of tonight's Bible study is one of the most wonderful prayers in Scripture. It is a prayer that I think touches all the bases, and it will be very helpful for us to notice what apostle Paul is praying for.

Colossians 1:9-14 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

A. BEING FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL

Colossians 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Remember, I told you guys that apostle Paul had not seen the believers of Colosse in person, yet he treated them like his own congregation. This shows that Paul had a heart of a caring pastor.

To begin with, he prays for others and not for himself. The requests in his prayers center on spiritual blessings, not on material or physical matters. Of course, there is nothing wrong to pray for physical or material needs. But spiritual needs are vastly more important.

Every believer needs to have "the knowledge of His will." No Christian would ever dare to say that he had "arrived" to the pinnacle of spiritual maturity and needed to learn anything more. If anyone does that, that Christian would only declare his ignorance.

The will of God is an important part of a successful Christian life. He wants us to know His will and understand it. As we study His Word and pray, we discover new and exciting truths about God's will for us.

In the language of the New Testament, 'to be filled' means to be "controlled by." When we are filled with anger, we are controlled by anger. To be "filled with the Spirit" as mentioned in Eph. 5:18 means to be "controlled by the Spirit." Paul's prayer, then, is that these believers might be controlled by the full knowledge of God's will.

Many people want to know about the will of God in their lives. That is very good. We can divide God's will for us in two sections: general will and specific will.

The general will of God for all His believers is given clearly in the Bible. The specific will of God for any given situation must always agree with what He has already revealed in His Word. The better we know God's general will, the easier it will be to determine His specific guidance in daily life. Paul did not encourage the Colossians to seek visions or wait for voices. He prayed that they might get deeper into God's Word and have greater wisdom and insight concerning His will.

Great men of God like Charles Spurgeon, G. Campbell Morgan, and H.A. Ironside never had the privilege of formal Bible training. But they were devoted students of the Word, learning its deeper truths through hours of study, meditation and prayer. The first step toward fullness of life is spiritual intelligence - growing in the will of God by knowing the Word of God. We all should strive to achieve it.

B. WALKING WORTHY OF THE LORD

Colossians 1:10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

To walk worthy of the Lord, it requires two things from us: the knowledge of God's Word and the obedience to the Word. In the Christian life, knowledge and obedience go together. There is no separation between learning and living. The wisdom that Paul mentioned here was not simply a head knowledge of deep spiritual truths. True spiritual wisdom must affect our daily lives.

It is not we who work for God. It is God who works in us and through us to produce the fruit of His grace. Christian service is the result of born-again believer's devotion. The work that we do is the outflow of the life that we live. It is by abiding in Christ that we can produce fruit.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

God must prepare the worker before the man can do the work. God spent thirteen years preparing Joseph for his ministry in Egypt, before he became the prime minister. It took forty years preparing Moses to lead Israel. Jesus spent three years teaching His disciples how to bear fruit. Even the learned Apostle Paul needed a "postgraduate course" in an Arabia desert before he could serve God with effectiveness.

A newborn babe can cry and make its presence known, but he cannot work. A new Christian can witness for Christ and even win others, but he must be taught to walk and learn God's wisdom before he is placed in an office of responsible ministry.

C. PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING WITH JOY

Colossians 1:11-12 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all (1) patience and (2) longsuffering with (3) joy; 12 (4) giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

Too many Christians have a tendency to quit when circumstances become difficult.

1) Patience

We must never think that patience is complacency. Patience is endurance in action. It is not the Christian sitting in a rocking chair, waiting for God to do something. It is the soldier on the battlefield, keeping on fighting when the situation gets worse by minute.

2) Longsuffering

Along with patience, we need 'long-suffering'. This word means "self-restraint" and is the opposite of revenge. Patience has to do primarily with circumstances, while long-suffering has to do with people. God is long-suffering toward people because of His love and grace. Long-suffering is one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

2Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

It is amazing how people can patiently endure trying circumstances, only to lose their tempers with a friend or loved one. Moses had long-suffering during the contest with Pharaoh in Egypt. But he lost his temper with his own people and, as a result, forfeited his right to enter the Promised Land.

3) Joyfulness

God's power is evidenced in our lives not only in our patience and long-suffering, but also in our joyfulness. When circumstances are difficult, we should exhibit joyful patience. When people are hard to live with, we should reveal joyful long-suffering.

Is it easy to do it? Are you kidding me? Absolutely no! But as we grow older in the Lord and learn to trust Him in everything, we get to have the joy that cannot be robbed or taken away by anyone in the world including the devil.

We often use the words 'joy' and 'happiness' interchangeably, but a distinction should be made. Happiness often depends on happenings. If circumstances and people do everything the way we want, we are happy. But joy is independent of both circumstances and people. The most joyful epistle Paul wrote was Philippians, and he wrote it from jail as he faced the possibility of being martyred for his faith.

Only God's Spirit working within us can give us joy in the midst of troubled circumstances and problem people. Joy is not something that we ourselves "work up". It is something the Spirit Himself "works in" to our lives.

4) Thankfulness

Another evidence of God's power in our lives is thankfulness. Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit will be joyful and thankful to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:18-20 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

When we lose our joy, we start complaining and becoming critical and make those who are around us hard to live with us. We get to lose our focus on Jesus and we become cynical and bitter to God.

The Colossian epistle is filled with thanksgiving. Paul gave thanks for the church in Colosse, and he prayed that they might grow in their own thanksgiving to God. The Christian life should abound with thanksgiving. One of the evidences of spiritual growth in our Bible study is thanksgiving in spite of all of the problems in our lives.

D. REDEMPTION THROUGH THE BLOOD OF JESUS

Colossians 1:13-14 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Redemption has the idea of release by a legal ransom. The price for our release was paid by the blood of Jesus.

This is one reason why "pleading the blood of Jesus" - the right sense, not in a "magical" sense - has such great significance in spiritual warfare. It shows the "receipt" of our lawful purchase as redeemed people from our former owner satan.

E. CHALLENGE

I usually finish each study with applications. But tonight I have a challenge for all of us including myself.

As we review this marvelous prayer, we need spiritual intelligence if we are going to live to please God. We also need practical obedience in our walk and work. But the result of all of this must be spiritual power in the inner man, power that leads to joyful patience and long-suffering, with thanksgiving.

Have we been praying this way lately? If not, we can start it this way from tonight.