

The Roadmap for Change

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[0 : 0 0] 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, 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, 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. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Amen, this is God's word. Now, the whole passage that we just read, if you read it the way that Paul wrote it in the Greek, it's really just one sentence. So you could think, Paul's really trying to communicate to us one idea this morning.

And there's two ways that you could read it. One way you could read this is to say, this passage is teaching you and I how to pray. Because we see how Paul prayed for the church in Colossae.

And it's good to keep that in mind, and you can keep that in the back of your head as we read it. But there's another way to read it, which is to say, Paul in this passage is telling us how to grow.

[1 : 2 1] Because within his prayer, you see what he does is he lays out a roadmap for how people change. And some of you, I know, because you're human beings, and I'm a human being, some of you have already lost your New Year's resolution.

It's only January 12th. How did you fail so much already? People fail their resolutions early. But what Paul is telling us this morning is that even if you've failed at your New Year's resolution, growth in the Christian life is absolutely possible.

It's absolutely possible. And that's what we're going to see this morning if you know how true change works. And what Paul shows us in this prayer is this. True change comes through spirit-empowered knowledge that looks back.

That's the whole point we're going to look at this morning. True change comes through spirit-empowered knowledge that looks back. And we're going to break down that idea over the next few minutes. And so what Paul starts with in this passage is some, he starts with knowledge.

You see that in verse 9. He says, since we started praying for you, we've been asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will. And that may strike some of you differently than it strikes others of you.

[2 : 3 3] You know, for some of you, knowledge is something that's not inspiring. Some of you, when you were five years old, I bet, knew that school was not for you. And the idea of going somewhere just to fill yourself with knowledge is not a very inspiring idea.

And it's also not inspiring because we all know intuitively, whether you're a Christian or not, we all know that faith is more than knowledge, right? There are so many people in this world who know a lot about the scriptures, and it has no impact on who they are as a person.

They just know a lot. In fact, sometimes it's almost worse for them because it makes them proud. And that's not the kind of knowledge, though, that Paul is talking about in this passage. And you know that because of verse 10.

What does Paul say? He says, So the kind of knowledge that Paul wants the Colossians to have, that he wants you and I to have, is a knowledge that actually changes you.

And he uses a metaphor there in verse 10. Not every Bible translation picks this up, but if you've got the ESV, which is in our pews, what he literally says is, He uses that metaphor for walking because walking is, it's all about the paths you take in life.

[3 : 56] Paul is saying, I want this knowledge to be the kind of thing that transforms every step you take in this life. It's a metaphor. So that whatever this knowledge is, and we'll talk about that in a minute, it touches every part of who you are.

It's not just a Sunday knowledge. Okay. And the way that Paul emphasizes that is in verse nine. He uses two words that you and I could read right over.

But if you know your Bible well, it changes the way that you see it. He says, he calls it knowledge. But then what does he say? Okay. Asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Okay. Now, in the Old Testament, whenever you see those two words together, wisdom and understanding, it's always, it's a pair of words that's used together to talk about everyday life.

So do you remember when David, King David, greatest king they ever had in Israel? When David handed over the kingdom to his son Solomon, he prayed for him. And one of the things he looked at, he looked at Solomon.

[5 : 00] He said, Solomon, I'm praying for you. And in first Chronicles 22, he says, may the Lord give you wisdom and understanding. And then he says, why? He says, so that, so that when you're king, you will obey the law of the Lord.

Okay. And here's another example. In Isaiah 11, Isaiah 11 is a prophecy about who Jesus will be. And one of the prophecies says this. It says, the spirit of the Lord will rest upon this man, this Jesus that will come.

The spirit of wisdom and understanding so that he will fear God and he will judge not by what his eyes see and he'll decide disputes not by what his ears hear, but with righteousness, he'll judge the poor and decide with equity, the meek of the earth.

Last example, just to, I'm trying to paint a portrait here for you. In Proverbs 2, the father in Proverbs says this to his son. He said, my son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding, he says, then you will understand the fear of the Lord.

Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity and every good path. So what am I trying to say here? When Paul talks about, when Paul says my prayer for you is that you'll have knowledge and wisdom and understanding, he's saying, I want you guys to know how to live well.

[6 : 21] It's as practical as it could be. It's not just about Sundays. He's saying, I want you to have the knowledge of God's will in such a way that every single step you take outside your door is transformed by that knowledge.

Because think about David, the example I just gave. David knew, and if you know David's story, you know this, David knew how hard it was to be a good king. David failed so much, so greatly.

Even though he was a great king, he had some great failings. And so David's looking at his son. You can almost imagine him shaking his son saying, oh Lord, give this boy wisdom and understanding because being a king is hard.

You know, life is hard, right? A lot of times we talk about Christianity and we act like what Christianity gives you is a list of do's and don'ts. And if you just follow the code, you'll be okay.

But life is way harder than that, right? You know, one of the best stories that Solomon ever faces, remember that famous story where two women come to Solomon and they both claim that this baby is theirs?

[7 : 23] There's nothing in the Bible that can show you how to resolve that conflict. Remember, Solomon looks at the two women and he says, okay, let's cut the child in half. And because he knew, he knew that the woman who was the most disturbed by that idea was the real mother, right?

That required wisdom. That required wisdom. Or think about this. You have a friend who's dealing with an addiction. What do you do? Do you encourage them?

Do you console them? Do you confront them? Or when someone you know is going through a sin, what's the right word to say? Well, sometimes it's one word and sometimes it's another.

And it takes wisdom to know which is the right way. Every part of life, it's situational, right? And what the Bible is saying is when you realize that, when you realize how complex life is, you and I, we need something that we don't have.

We need a wisdom that can help us to know how to walk every single step in this life. One of my favorite passages that sounds so counterintuitive is from Proverbs where the writer of Proverbs says this.

[8 : 30] He says two things that are the opposite. He says, Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will sound just like him. So he's saying, don't debate with fools because you're going to sound like a fool if you try to debate with them.

But then the very next verse, the same writer says this. He says, answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.

So on the one hand, he says, don't debate fools because you may look like a fool. But then the same, in the next breath, he says, debate with a fool or they're not going to see their foolishness. And the point is, well, which one is it?

It takes wisdom. It takes wisdom to know in the moment. Do I answer this person or in my wisdom, do I say, I'm not even going to engage with what that person just said? It takes wisdom. And so knowing God's will, what Paul is talking about here, that's what we need.

If we want to change, if we want to grow, if we want to walk in the right path, Paul says, you've got to know wisdom. You've got to be filled with the knowledge of God's will. And I think there's a misconception at this point, which is so easy to make.

[9 : 33] And I'm sure you see it made all the time, which is to say, you know, the way that so much of Paul's language here is passive. Something needs to happen to you. You know, he says there in verse nine, he says, we ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

And that can give you the impression that the way for you to get God's will for your life is to just sit and wait. And if you ask God, do I go left or do I go right?

If you wait long enough, if you listen well enough, he'll speak to you and he'll say, go left, go right. That's how, and that's how some people treat the will of God. They say, I'm just going to wait for God to, to tell me what to do.

And so you could read Paul like this saying, we pray to God so that he'll tell us how we can live well. But that doesn't make sense, right? Because the whole Bible is telling us how to live well.

In fact, one of the main messages of all of scripture is God saying, listen, I've spoken to you. I've shown you what is good. You know, one of the famous, most famous passages, Micah 6, 8, he says, he has told you, oh man, what is good.

[10 : 41] And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God. God has spoken. He has shown us what's good and what's evil. But the hard part is getting what he's told us into our heart in such a way that we actually can internalize it and begin to live in the light of that, right?

A couple days ago, Carly and I were at Cadoba, one of these kind of subway type restaurants where you go from person to person and you tell them what you want on your sandwich. And the girl who was in front of us was just training for the first time.

And it was so painful, not because she was doing anything wrong, but it was so painful because she didn't know what to do. And so every movement that she made had to be told to her by the woman next to her.

And so simple things that would have been simple for anyone else took a long time. So, you know, do you want guacamole? And I said, well, does that cost extra? And she said, well, I don't know.

And she looks at the lady next to her and says, yeah, that cost extra. Every single step was more difficult because she had not internalized the law, the law of Cadoba. It hadn't become a part of who she was.

[11 : 54] And you knew, you knew that it was not because she was a fool. It was because she just needed more time. And the more she practiced it, the more it become a part of who she is. Now, life, if you remember nothing else, remember this.

Life is not a Cadoba line, right? It's not all about just following the directions of the person next to you. It's way more complicated than that because it takes wisdom. You know, you go to the Bible and you say, should I marry this person?

And what does the Bible say? It gives principles that can guide you, but it can't really tell you whether you can marry this person or not. Sometimes it does. And we need wisdom.

And that brings us to the second point, which is what Paul wants for his people is knowledge, but it's not just knowledge. He calls it spiritual knowledge. He says, I want you to be filled with knowledge and all spiritual wisdom.

And it's because Paul knows true change comes through spirit-empowered knowledge. It's not just knowing the facts of the scriptures. It's the spirit getting inside of you and embedding those facts in such a way that they make sense and that you instinctively know how to live the life that God's called us to live.

[13 : 10] Practically, what does this look like? You know, I've been describing in terms of do you go left or do you go right? But I think it's way more practical than just decision-making. Think about the person who's dealing with deep anxiety, maybe depression even, and they're just feeling a darkness in their soul and they don't know how to climb out of that.

And, you know, imagine the friend who comes to them and says, don't worry, God loves you. And if you've ever dealt with anxiety or depression, you know that sometimes someone can give you the right words.

They can tell you the truth that maybe you need to hear and it just washes right over you. It means nothing to you. And you know, you say to yourself, I wish that could settle into my heart.

But what you're telling me, which I think is true, it's not getting deep where it actually makes me, where it heals me, makes me feel better. And that's what we're talking about when we're talking about what the spirit does.

The spirit has the power to take something like the word of the gospel, the kind of message to you that your sins can actually be forgiven, that the guilt you carry around in your soul, that can actually be washed away.

[14 : 24] What the spirit does is makes that real in your heart so that it actually means something to you. You know, I heard this illustrated really well one time by a pastor at a former church, and he was talking about the children's catechism.

We would do kind of what we do this morning with the kids. We would do it every Sunday night during the service. And one time he described the hope of that really well.

He said, you know, when we teach kids all these truths, we know that we're not making them Christians. We know that we're not changing their hearts. But he said, what we're doing is we're laying wood down before God.

Fuel so that God, through his spirit, might come and bring the fire. It's an allusion to Elijah whenever Elijah set up the great wooden sacrifice altar.

And he prayed. And it was God who came down and brought the fire onto the sacrifice. And that's a great way of thinking about what we do with all of our children's ministry is we know we can't change a child's heart.

[15 : 30] But we can give them all the equipment so that when the Holy Spirit comes into their lives, suddenly they look back and they find that everything they learned in Sunday school and in catechism was helpful to them and helps them understand what finally they really believe with their deepest heart.

And the same thing is true with you and I. You know, we come here and you may come here this morning and you may say, I don't care about Colossians. I don't even know what this book's about. But the hope is that even if your heart's not in the right place, that God, through his spirit, can come down and bring a light bulb.

Bring a light bulb that you could have never brought for yourself to make it meaningful. Okay? But then when Paul talks about the spirit, he talks about it in a really interesting way. He talks about the strength of the spirit.

You see there down in verse 11, he says, I pray for you to have all these things. Bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy. So the way that Paul imagines the spirit is this thing that makes you strong.

[16 : 40] It gives you a power that you would not have for yourself. But notice why, you know, what is Paul's dream for that power? You know, he says it's all power according to his glorious might.

So he's, Paul's saying kind of the greatest power you can imagine. The kind of power that can raise Jesus Christ from the dead. He says, I want that inside of you. But then for what purpose?

What does he say? He says, for all endurance and patience with joy. You know, sometimes we think about when we imagine what would it look like for the spirit to move. And we imagine, you know, our church would grow in number.

You know, maybe somebody would be healed. You may have all kinds of ideas about what it would look like to see the spirit really move. But when Paul imagines the spirit in all of its power, what is he imagining?

He's imagining someone that endures. You know, and Paul is a guy who's been to prison so many times. He's been beaten. He's been flogged. He's been sick. He's been bitten by a snake and miraculously healed.

[17 : 44] All these things. And Paul's saying, you know what you really need? What you really need from the Holy Spirit is the power to endure. You know, I remember a pastor one time, an older man who was just about to enter into retirement.

And he said, he was talking to a group of seminary students. And he said, you know, when I was young, I prayed that God would do great things in my ministry. And now that I'm old, my great prayer is that he will allow me to finish well.

And it was because the context was he had so many friends who were so gifted, who were so eloquent or all these things. And for whatever reason, they fell away from the ministry.

They fell away from the faith. They had a major sin that made them lose their ministry altogether. And he realized what's really miraculous at the end of the day is that God can hold someone in the palm of their hand for their whole life.

The palm of his hand for their whole life. And that they can endure till the end. That's when you know the Spirit's working with power that someone can sustain. Okay. Now, what do we do with that?

[18 : 49] To summarize everything we've just said. If all of that's true, then how do you live? How do you change? Well, there's what you can do. And then there's what you know that you can never do.

You know, what we can do is we can pursue the knowledge of God's will. We can bury ourselves in the scriptures. We can memorize passages. You know, why do we have a sermon every Sunday morning? Why not throw away the sermon?

Because some people fall asleep during the sermon. I know that. Why have a sermon? It's not to hear me talk. It's because we believe that the Word of God has a power.

That there's a real power in this that surpasses whatever eloquence the pastor has. And even when the pastor can't speak well hardly at all, the power is still there because the Holy Spirit's in the Word.

Okay. So we commit ourselves to the Word in all different ways. Okay. But then at the same time, and this is what humbles us. That doesn't make us proud for our knowledge. It's knowing that we could do that all day long.

[19 : 46] And if the Holy Spirit's not moving in our hearts, it's worthless. We need the Holy Spirit. We need spirit-filled knowledge so that when we hear the gospel with our ears, we have that thing in your heart that goes, ah, it's true.

It really is true. And God is good. Right? Okay. Last part. Okay. So true change comes through spirit-empowered knowledge. And the last part, it looks backwards.

Briefly. Here at the end, Paul kind of goes on a tangent, but it's not really a tangent at all. And he says, in verse 12, Now, probably, most scholars think this, probably when a Jew would have read this passage, all of the language would have sounded so much like the Exodus to them.

Because what does God do in the Exodus? He delivers his people from the domain of darkness into his kingdom. He redeems them by the blood of the Lamb.

He provides them forgiveness. He transfers them. He delivers them. Right? And then what does he do at the end? He gives them an inheritance. You see that in verse 12.

[21 : 14] So, Paul's saying, you know, in the Old Testament, the inheritance of the people, the promised land, was this physical land called Canaan.

But Paul's saying, you Christians, you know, you have an inheritance too. You know, you have a promised land. And you haven't reached it yet. And at the same time, you're already standing in it.

Because of what Jesus Christ has done, it's already been secured for you. And you're reaping the blessings already of that promised land. Here's the question I want to leave you with.

And then I'm going to say a few more things. So don't, I've still got more to say. The question I want to leave you with is, What right do you have to believe that true change in your life is possible?

You know, if you're like me, So often I want to change. And I stumble and I stumble and I stumble. And there has to come a point where you say, Is change really possible?

[22 : 13] And the justification that Paul gives, He's not trying to motivate them to reach out for something that they don't have. What he's saying is, You can believe that change in your life is possible.

That spiritual growth is possible. Because it's already been secured. Not because you need to do something and then you can reach out and drive. It's because it's already been secured for you.

What has the Father done? He has delivered you from the domain of darkness. He has transferred you. If you were here last week, You remember all of the first part of this book, Paul is saying, I'm so thankful for you because you understand the gospel.

You understand what Christ has done for you already. And what does that mean? That means that growth, Spiritual growth, This thing that you want, I hope you want it. And I want it. It's not a means of getting into the kingdom.

It's the kingdom working itself out in us. Christ has died for us. If you believe in that, You've already been transferred into the kingdom. And so growth, Even though it's so painful sometimes, Growth is really the outworking Of what Christ has already done for us.

[23 : 22] Here's the gospel this morning. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life That you could never live. That you and I could never live. That you and I failed to live.

He lived a life that was fully pleasing to God. And even so, He brings you and I into His kingdom. He offers forgiveness of sins. And once we're in His kingdom, He begins to transform us In a way that we can never transform ourselves.

You know, I was talking to a friend of mine in Scotland this week. And he was asking me, What's new? And I said, Well, what's new is, Nowadays, And this is new for me, Because I was raised in the suburbs And I love the city.

I said, Some days I lay in bed at night And I pull out my phone. And I scroll through used truck ads. And something I would have never done before. But what's happened? Columbia has changed me.

I wear Carhartt jackets now. Sometimes. Sometimes. Right? You know, When you're moved to a new land, Sometimes without even realizing it, It changes you. And what Paul is saying is, Here's your hope for change.

[24 : 25] That you've already been transferred to a new land. The kingdom of His beloved Son. And the longer you stay in that place, And the more you pursue the knowledge of that land, It's going to change you.

Without you even realizing, One day you'll turn around and you'll say, Look how far, Not how far I've come, But look how far the Lord has brought me to this place. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, We thank you for your grace.

We thank you for your power to transfer us From the kingdom of darkness To the kingdom of your beloved Son. Help us to lean into your grace And find our hope and our peace in that alone.

In your Son's name we pray. Amen. Amen.