

A Prayer For The New Year

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[0 : 00] Well, what a joy and delight this service has been already. My heart's been encouraged and warmed just with the singing and the hearing of God's Word. But I am excited as well about a message that I believe God has for us as a church on the brink of the new year.

Before we do jump in and get started, I would like to dismiss the children. They're already on their way out. Kindergarten through fifth graders, please head on back and enjoy your time.

Together in the Children's Ministry. Well, it's been said before, but I'll just like to add my greetings, my welcome to you. Happy New Year to each one of you.

It's good to be gathered together with you here on this first Sunday of 2015. And speaking of the new year, let me ask you a question. Any New Year's resolutions out there?

Anybody have anything that they'd like to do? Yeah. So, to be honest, about 10 or 15 years ago, I used to be a little bit jaded. I used to be a little bit anti New Year's resolutions.

[1 : 04] I used to say, well, if you've got to change something, do it. Change it now. Don't wait for the new year. And, you know, there is truth to that. There is something to be said for that. Don't wait.

Change now. But I have, over time, come to realize that there is a goodness, a freshness in the cycles of life, in new seasons, a good time for a new growth and a renewed vision.

And I've become a little bit less anti New Year's resolution. And I actually have a few myself that I'd like to see God work and do in my life. So, speaking of New Year's resolutions, an article that I read recently, top five New Year's resolutions.

These are the most popular ones, you know, that people generally make year after year after year.

Number five, take up a new hobby. Learn something new. New activity, new hobby.

Number four, make more money. Right. That's right. Make more money. Get a better job.

Something along those lines. Number three, improve my relationships.

[2 : 06] Improve my relationships. And that certainly is a worthy and good resolution. Number two, stop. Stop smoking. Right. Stop smoking.

And number one, the number one, year after year after year, New Year's resolution is to lose weight. That's right. To be more healthy.

And, you know, there is nothing wrong in and of themselves with any of these New Year's resolutions. But let me just remind you that if your goal, if our goal is simply to be healthy, wealthy, and wise, then our goals are far too short.

Our goals are far too low. We need to have an eternal perspective. We need to be seeking after the things that are above and the things that are pleasing to God.

God. This New Year, let's strive to put a priority on things of eternal significance. Not simply learning more. Not simply earning more. Not simply smoking less or weighing less.

[3 : 08] But instead, let's be growing in our relationship with God. And let's be encouraging each other in their spiritual growth as well. And so we often wish each other a Happy New Year.

We wish each other success in the New Year. But in Colossians chapter 1, our text this morning, Paul didn't simply wish people happiness.

Paul didn't simply wish people success. But Paul prayed for them. Paul prayed for their spiritual prosperity. Turn, if you would, to Colossians chapter 1 this morning.

We're going to read through verses 1 through 14. And then we're going to really focus in on verses 9 through 14. Earlier this week, I shot off a quick email to Mary. And I said, we're going to be looking at verses 1 through 11.

And that was a typo. We're going to be looking at 1 through 14. But don't worry, today we are going to specifically be focusing in on just those last few verses, verses 9 through 14. And so Paul prayed very specifically for the spiritual prosperity of the Colossian believers.

[4 : 17] Paul prayed that these believers would grow and that they would develop in several very specific ways. And so we need to ask ourselves a question.

In fact, there's going to be lots of questions and answers. That's kind of my format today. We're going to work our way through this passage, asking questions and answering those questions to better understand how we can pray for each other in this new year.

And so we need to ask ourselves the question, how does the prayer that we see in Colossians chapter 1 line up with our own prayers?

In other words, how closely do our prayers mirror the prayer that we see Paul praying on behalf of the Colossian believers? What is it that we tend to pray for when we pray for other believers?

And so to fully understand what Paul was praying on behalf of the Colossians and to fully understand how we should be praying, we're going to work our way through this passage together.

[5 : 20] So Colossians chapter 1 this morning. If you're using one of the Pew Bibles, it's page 1831. Colossians chapter 1. Verse 1.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father.

So these first two verses, just introductory here, kind of like an email, who's writing it, who they're writing to, what this is about. So Paul and Timothy, co-workers in the gospel, are together writing this letter to the believers, to the men and women in the church of Colossae.

And he's wishing them grace and peace from God to them. Verse 3. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing, as it also does among you.

[6 : 33] Since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our fellow servant, he is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

All right, so this next paragraph here, verses 3 through 8, again, introductory. Basically, what Paul is saying here is, you know what? I have never been to Colossae. I have never been to the church in Colossae.

I've never met most of you as believers. And although I have not met you, I have heard about you. And although I don't know you, I am still praying for you.

And he references a man here named Epaphras. Epaphras was an early believer in the city of Colossae. He was one of the founding believers that helped get the church started there.

And he has been passing along good reports to Paul of the spiritual growth, of the new life, of the fruit that God is producing in these Colossian believers' lives.

[7 : 35] And what is Paul's response? He says, we thank God and we pray for you. We praise God for what he's doing, and we pray that God will continue to do it in a greater and greater way.

Basically, that's what Paul's prayer for these Colossian believers is, is that they will continue to grow spiritually. He is praying for the spiritual growth and the well-being of these believers.

And so it's interesting that even though Paul had never met them, he was still interested in them.

And so that should influence the way that we pray. There's lots of people in this room here today, a couple hundred people probably close to in the church today.

And you probably don't know everybody. But that doesn't mean that you can't pray for everybody who's in here. You can pray for the spiritual growth and the well-being of those that you know and of those fellow believers, those men and women here in this church and elsewhere that you don't know.

Paul was interested in the spiritual growth of the Colossian believers, even though that's not where he directly was ministering and serving. And so again, we're going to ask ourselves a series of questions and answers this morning.

[8 : 50] So my initial question for you once again is, how often do you pray for Christians in the same way that Paul prayed for the Colossian believers? How often do you pray for other believers in the same way that we see Paul praying for these believers?

Now, think about it here for a minute. Think about the last time that you prayed for another believer, another brother or sister in Christ. What was it that you prayed for?

Maybe you prayed for health. Maybe you prayed for healing. Maybe you prayed for a job. Maybe you prayed for some other type of activity or event or situation in their lives. And there's not anything wrong with praying for those things. We should pray for those things. But if we look at the scope of Scripture, and if we look at the prayers that we see in Scripture, the vast majority of the prayers in the Bible are for the spiritual growth and the spiritual well-being of other believers, more than the physical needs and the situations and circumstances that we find ourselves in.

Now, we should pray for those things, but we should even more importantly be praying that in and through those circumstances, in and through those situations, that God will be getting a work done and growing and building and encouraging spiritual growth in the lives of his children.

[10:18] So, what is it that we should pray? How is it that we should pray for Paul, for other believers, in the same way that Paul prayed for these Colossian believers? Well, look at verse 9, if you would.

Verse 9, he says, And so from the day we heard it, in other words, from the day we got the report from Epaphras, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

So we have to ask ourselves a question, what does it mean to not cease? Does that mean literally 24-7 prayer, non-stop, never doing anything else but praying for the well-being, the spiritual well-being and growth of other believers?

No, obviously it doesn't. Obviously it can't mean that, that's physically not possible. But I believe what he means by saying not ceased is that he is regularly, consistently, purposefully praying for the spiritual well-being of these believers.

So my question for you is, are you regularly, consistently, purposefully praying for the spiritual well-being of other believers?

[11:31] Do you make that a priority? Do you have a plan to make that happen in your life? Not just simply randomly praying, not simply haphazardly, not just when somebody happens to come to your mind, but do you consistently, regularly, purposefully pray for the spiritual well-being of other believers?

Paul also says here that he desires that these believers be filled with the knowledge of God's will. We're going to get to that God's will part in just a minute here, but let's look at that word filled. What does it mean to be filled? To be completely saturated, filled, influenced by, in every single area of your life. Think about Ephesians 5.18.

Paul says, Do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit. Completely under the influence of the Spirit, every single action that you do, every single inch of your life, being saturated and influenced by the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth of God's word.

All right, so, not 24-7, but consistently and purposefully, filled, being completely saturated, but what is it that Paul was praying that they would be completely saturated with?

[12:50] What is it that he wanted them to be completely filled to the brim with as he consistently and regularly and purposefully prayed for them? He says that he desires that they are filled with a knowledge of God's will.

Verse 9, And so from the day we heard it, 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.

All right, so here's another question. What is God's will? Or more specifically, in this passage that we're looking at this morning, what is God's will?

Very oftentimes, people think of God's will or knowing God's will as knowing who they should marry or where they should live or what job opportunities they should pursue or what church they should become an active member in.

People are wanting to know, what does God want me to do? They think of God's will as being a very specific, highly personalized plan that they need to discover for themselves.

[13:58] But biblically speaking, that's, again, not often how we see God's will defined. In fact, more often than not, God's will is simply another word for God's commands.

God's will is God's revealed command. Now, at times, the Bible does talk about God's will referring to his unchanging, sovereign control of the universe.

God's will will be done. It's unchanging. It is set before the world was even created. God's will will happen. His sovereign control over everything.

But the way that God's will is used in this passage and throughout Scripture really isn't something hidden that needs to be discovered, but it is something revealed that needs to be obeyed. God's will is God's word. God's will is God's truth for our lives. It is something that we need to step out and obey, not seek out and discover.

[15 : 04] So where is it that God's will is revealed? If it's revealed, if it's not hidden, if it's plainly available to us, where is it that we can discover God's will? God's will is revealed by God's spirit in God's word.

1 Thessalonians 4.3 says, For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality. All right, so part of the spiritual growth, part of sanctification includes abstaining from sexual immorality.

What is God's will? Well, one aspect of it is to be sexually pure. That's a clearly revealed command in scripture that we need to step out and obey.

Again, 1 Thessalonians 5.3, verses 16, 17, and 18. What is God's will? Verse 16. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.

Giving thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ for you. Again, clearly revealed truths in God's word for us to step out and obey.

[16 : 13] That is God's will for us. And so when Paul is praying that these Colossian believers would be filled, completely saturated, with a knowledge of the will of God, he's praying that they would be filled with the word of God and empowered by the spirit of God.

Another question, what does it mean to be filled with not only God's will, but spiritual wisdom and understanding? Okay, so it's not just enough to know something in our head.

It's not just enough to hear something in our ears, but we must step out and do it, right? Our Wednesday night small group studies, Emily and I had the privilege of being in the James study group.

And as you know, that's a key theme of James. Not just hearing the word, but stepping out and doing it. Not just saying you believe it, but actually living it out, living out the truth. And so Paul here says, I want you to be filled with a knowledge of God's will for you, and I want you to step out and do it.

I want you to apply that knowledge, practically speaking, to your lives. Spiritual wisdom. Wisdom, practically applying the truth to your life. Living out the knowledge that you have.

[17 : 32] All right, so Paul prayed that the Colossian Christians' lives would be completely saturated with a knowledge and an application of God's will in their lives.

And that leads us to another question. Why, out of everything that Paul could have prayed for, why is it that he prayed that prayer? That's the prayer. That's the bulk of the prayer.

And everything that follows supports that and fleshes it out. The prayer that Paul prayed is that they would be filled with a knowledge of the will of God and that they would practically apply it and live it out.

Why did he pray that? And by extension, why should we pray that? Why should we pray that for each other? The answer is, so that they will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and be fully pleasing to him.

Verse 10 says, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, so on and so forth. We'll continue working our way on through those things.

[18 : 32] But to answer the question, why out of everything he could have prayed for, he prayed that they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will, the answer is, so that they will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and be fully pleasing to him.

Let's break it down a little bit further. Let's ask ourselves, what do these words mean? Words mean something. Paul chose these words for a specific meaning. Why is he using the word walk here? Many people's New Year's resolution is to be healthy, lose weight. He's not talking about walking as an exercise plan here. Paul is talking about walking being a synonym for your lifestyle, for how you live.

The way you walk is the way you live. Your walk is your lifestyle. And so Paul says that he wants these Colossian believers, that he wants their lifestyle to be worthy of the Lord and fully pleasing to him.

And we say, well, it's by grace that we've been saved. It's by God's mercy alone that he has saved us. We are not worthy of salvation.

[19 : 44] We are not worthy of a relationship with God. So we need to ask ourselves, what does this word worthy mean? The idea here is an idea of weightiness.

To be worthy is to be of equal weight. You know those old time scales where you put a fixed weight on this side and you put a pile of something else on this side and it balances out.

And once it finds its equilibrium, you know that they are of equal weight. Well, that's how our lives should be as believers. When our life is on this side and the life of Christ is on this side, it should be equal.

It should be balanced. Our lives should be a reflection of Christ's life. That's the goal. That's what we should be striving for. Of equal weight. Believers are to be an equal standard to God's standards.

We are to be holy as God is holy. And we are to be fully pleasing. What is the goal of the Christian life? The goal of the Christian life is Christ-likeness.

[20 : 51] To glorify God and to enjoy him and to live for him and to serve others, but ultimately to be like Christ. To know and to do everything that God expects from his people.

And you may be sitting there and thinking, wow, I thought this was supposed to be an encouraging, uplifting New Year's message. And this sounds pretty daunting. This sounds impossible.

And you're right, it is. In and of ourselves, in our own strength, it is impossible to be fully pleasing to God. It is impossible to be worthy of the Lord and for our lives to be equivalent to Christ's life.

We're going to get more to the how-to in the following verses. In verse 11 in particular. So, Paul is praying for a knowledge of Christ that leads to a transformed life, verse 9, and he's praying for Christ-like living in the lives of these believers.

So, the question is, once again, what is Christ-like living? What does that look like? What should it look like in our lives? And so, in verses 10 and following, we're going to look at four specific ways that Christ-likeness is demonstrated, four specific ways that Paul prays for Christ-likeness to be manifested in the lives of these men and women, of these believers in the church in Colossae.

[22 : 27] So, what does it look like? Well, here are four specific areas of growth. Let's read verses 9 and right on through verse 14 again. 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.

What does it look like to be fully pleasing to him? What does it mean to be worthy of the Lord?

Starting right here, it means to be bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God and be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might and all endurance and patience with joy and giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints.

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. What does it look like to be Christ-like? What does it look like to be transformed more and more like Christ? Number one, the middle part of verse 10 there, it means to be bearing fruit, spiritual fruit, in every good work.

You know, Paul started off this letter and he said, I've never met you, but I've heard about you. I don't know you, but I am excited about the spiritual growth, about the fruit that I hear about in your lives.

[23 : 59] And Paul says, I am going to continue, first of all, to pray that you will continue to bear more and more fruit. Paul was not only thankful for the reports he heard, but he prayed that God would continue to increase their spiritual fruit.

So how does Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers, how should that influence our prayers for each other here today? Well, we should be praying that God would be producing spiritual fruit, spiritual growth.

We should be thankful for what he has done and is doing, and we should be praying that God will continue to do the work in men and women's lives so that they will grow spiritually, continue to be fruitful, and spiritually prosperous.

The second thing that he prays for on their behalf is not only that they would be bearing fruit, but that they would be increasing in the knowledge of God.

We see that in the last part of verse 10 there, increasing in the knowledge of God. This here is kind of a cyclical effect here. The more we know God, the more that we are like God.

[25 : 13] The more that we live in the way that we should, the better we know God. One influences the other in a positive way. It is a cyclical pattern of growth here that the more we know God, the more we are like God.

The more that we are like God, the better that we know him. And so Paul here, the second thing he prays for is that they would be increasing in their knowledge of God.

Increasing in their knowledge of God. The third thing he prays for, verse 11, look at verse 11 here together, is that they will be strengthened. That they will be strengthened.

He says, may you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for the endurance and patience with joy. Now with joy, I think actually is better, fits better with verse 12.

So we're just going to kind of lop that off and include that in with verse 12 there. So Paul here is praying for these believers and he says, may you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience.

[26 : 17] For all endurance and patience. This is the good news here. This is the exciting news here. We're talking about being worthy of Christ. We're talking about being fully pleasing to God that our walk, our lifestyle be reflective of God.

And we're starting to feel a little bit discouraged and overwhelmed and saying, we can't do it. And that's exactly the position that God wants us to find ourselves in. Just like the song that we sang this morning together, the prayer that we prayed through that song, Lord, I need you.

Every hour I need you. We need God's strength in our lives. The only way that we will grow in a knowledge of God, the only way that spiritual fruit will be produced in our lives is through the strength of God alone.

Paul says that he prays that they will be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might. Let me encourage you with a truth here.

Your spiritual growth is not fueled by your strength. Your spiritual growth is fueled by God's glorious power and by God's glorious might.

[27 : 30] And so here is an even more exciting reality based upon that truth. If our growth is not based upon our power, but if our growth is based upon God's insurmountable power, then there is nothing in your life, there is no struggle that you are facing, there is no addiction that you find yourself in, there is no bondage that you are experiencing that is greater than the power of God.

God's power is glorious and mighty and strong and greater than anything that we are facing. There is no sin struggle that is too strong for the power of God to change in your life.

And so that is encouraging. And that's what Paul is praying, that they would be experiencing the fruit of God, that they would be growing in their knowledge of God, and that they would be doing it through the power of God, which is greater than anything that you may ever experience.

Well, he gives us a couple of examples here of some things that you and I may be experiencing. He says, with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience.

Now those words are kind of, sort of related, but they also have different applications. So what do the words endurance and patience mean? Well, when you are enduring something, that means that you find yourself in a difficult situation, a difficult circumstance.

[29 : 08] Any of you find yourselves in a difficult circumstance? Ever? Yeah, I know that I do. And so Paul here is praying that God's insurmountable power would be evident in their lives when people are facing difficult circumstances and difficult situations.

But he also prays for patience. Kind of, sort of, related to endurance, but I really think that the word patience here could be understood to be referring to people.

Not just difficult circumstances, not just difficult circumstances and situations, but patience when you are interacting with difficult people. Difficult people.

Patience with others. Do any of you interact on a regular basis with difficult people? Yes, we all certainly do.

And so Paul here is praying that these believers would experience the insurmountable power of God in difficult circumstances and situations and when interacting with difficult people.

[30 : 11] And the fourth thing that he prays to bear fruit, increase in knowledge, being strengthened, the fourth thing that he prays is verse 12 through verse 14.

He prays that these believers would be joyfully giving thanks to God the Father. That they would be joyfully giving thanks to God the Father.

Verse 12, let's add those two words in from verse 11. With joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance in the saints.

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.

That sounds pretty gospel-y, doesn't it? That sounds like a summary, a recap of the glorious news of the gospel. And if Paul is praying for these believers, why is he bringing the gospel into this?

[31 : 14] Why is he introducing these glorious gospel truths? Why is it that he reflects upon the gospel in these verses? It's because a gratitude problem is a gospel problem.

If you don't have a proper, thankful, joyful attitude towards God, it's because you don't understand the gospel. You don't fully grasp how the gospel has transformed your life.

You don't fully grasp what God has done on your behalf through his Son, Jesus Christ. Let me ask you a question. Are you a person who grumbles and complains and mumbles and murmurs about everything?

Or are you somebody who gives thanks about everything? Are you one of those people that people try to avoid when they see coming? Or they try not to get into a lengthy conversation with?

Because they know that all they're going to hear is moaning and groaning and griping and complaining. If that characterizes you, then you don't fully understand what God has done for you.

[32 : 24] And that's why Paul reminds us here of the glorious truth of the gospel. Because a gratitude problem ultimately is a gospel problem. And Christians that struggle with being grateful don't have a proper understanding of what the gospel is and what God has done in their lives.

So he reminds these believers of who they were before the gospel and he reminds them of who they are now because of the gospel. So four bullet points summarizing the gospel, what has God done for us?

Look at the second half of verse 12. who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Before conversion, you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

Before you became a child of God, you were blind to spiritual truths. But God did a work in your life. He brought faith into your life.

He opened up your eyes to the truths of the gospel. He gave you the ability to turn from your sin and to turn to him. He transformed you from darkness.

[33 : 35] He gave you an inheritance as one of his children to share in the glorious light of the gospel. If you have trouble with being thankful, reflect upon this truth.

You were dead and you are alive. You were blind and you can now see. You were in darkness, but you are now in light. You were not a part of God's family, but you are now a child of God.

God has qualified you, if you are a child of his, to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. But another part of the gospel, beginning of verse 13 there, God has delivered us from the domain of darkness.

Again, we were in bondage to sin. We were in spiritual darkness, but God has delivered us from that darkness of sin and given us spiritual sight and light.

Second half of verse 13, what else does the gospel do? What else has the gospel done for God's children? And transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son.

[34 : 39] We used to be enemies of God. We used to be fighting against God and God has transferred our citizenship to become citizens of God's kingdom, to be citizens of Christ's kingdom, to be citizens under Christ the king, our king.

He has transferred us from the kingdom of sin, the kingdom of this world, fighting and warring against God, instead to becoming a citizen of the kingdom of God.

In verse 14, he says, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin. What is the gospel? The gospel is simply that God has redeemed his people and forgiven them of their sins.

God has redeemed you if you are a child of God. He has bought you back, made you a part of his family, and he has forgiven your sin.

Are you a person who struggles with being grateful? Are you a person who is characterized by grumbling and complaining? Reflect upon these glorious truths of the gospel?

[35 : 50] Paul says that he desires that these believers are joyfully and regularly thanking God.

And if you have trouble with that, just think about who you were, what God has done, and who you are now. So what I want to do in conclusion here this morning is I want to pray for you as Christ the King Church.

I want to pray this passage for you. And then what we're going to do is I'm going to encourage you just to take a couple of minutes to turn to the people around you, just to pair up with some people nearby you, and I want you to pray this passage on behalf of the believers at this church, the men and women here in this church.

And so, would you please bow your head? I'm going to pray for you, and then in just a minute I'm going to invite you to turn to each other and pray with each other. Let's pray. God, I thank you and I rejoice for the spiritual fruit in the lives of these dear people of Christ the King Church.

And God, I want to ask you that you would continue to increase their fruit even more. I pray that they would be filled with the knowledge of your will with all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that they would walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ and that they would please him in every way.

[37 : 17] I pray that they would be bearing more fruit in every good deed. I pray that the people of Christ the King Church would be growing in a knowledge of you, God.

I pray that they would be strengthened with all power to have endurance for every difficult circumstance and to have patience for every difficult person that they come into contact with.

And God, I pray that they would be joyfully giving thanks to you because you have saved and redeemed them from the power of darkness and sin and welcomed them into the kingdom of your Son.

And God, I pray these things desiring to see your glory displayed through these people in an even greater way. And I pray all these things in Christ's name.

Amen.