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Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ *who are* in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, **Colossians 1:1-3**

Paul begins this letter, “praying always for you.” Why is he praying for them? Someone is sick or dying? Are they about to be destroyed by barbarians hordes? Did they lose their jobs and end up penniless on the streets? No!

Nothing bad is happening, so why does Paul say “I pray for you always?” Because he is so thankful for all that God has given to them. We have a tendency to think of prayer as something we do when we want something or when we are in trouble. But Paul here prays without ceasing in thankful joy for all that God has given them.

One of the actions songs the kids will learn tomorrow in VBS, talks about stars and you are supposed to wave your hands to simulate all the stars. But you could also use this to simulate all the blessings that God pours upon you.

⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; ⁵ because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as *it has* also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; ⁷ as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸ who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. **Colossians 1:4-8**

A few years ago Time magazine had a series of pictures of families around the world. They went around the world and helped an average family bring everything they owned out of their house and set it in the yard. Then they took a picture of the family with all their possessions. I’m sure you can imagine the American family surrounded by piles of stuff, and the African family with a couple bowls and a goat and that’s about it. Of course Time didn’t do the house of someone living in heaven, but Paul does it for us. He takes the Colossians and he sets out all that they own. So we can compare and see how we measure up. Do we have all the blessings that they do?

1. You are saints
2. you are filled with faith in Christ
3. You are filled with hope

4. You have hope in those things laid up in heaven

5. You have the true gospel preached to you

Later on in the book of Colossians we are going to find that the Colossians were being tempted by a new different gospel. Paul says you have the true gospel, the same one preached to all the world. You have it already why would you let go of that.

6. You have a faithful minister who brought you the gospel and still preaches it.

Paul never visited the church at Colossae. The Gospel was brought to them by Epaphras, who also remained as their pastor. I hope you agree that you also have a faithful pastor who weekly brings you the Gospel of truth.

7. You have a minister who even brags about your love

And now Epaphras is in Rome talking to Paul and he is bragging about the Christians in Colossae. He is bragging about their faith and love to Paul. This also you have. I can think of multiple times when I have bragged about you as a church. Many time when the teachers call, I tell them, "Take the call. You will never find another congregation that is more supportive and loving towards their called servants. "

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;

Colossians 1:9

Therefore all these things that Paul says the Christians in Colossae have, you have too. Therefore because you are all these things Paul says, I'm going to pray and ask God for MORE.

You might expect a pastor to say, "be content." But Paul shows boldness of faith. Instead since God has given us all this we have great confidence to ask for more. That confidence which says, "God has given me all this grace, therefore I will ask for more."

We talked about that boldness of faith last week. Remember Abraham, because God promised to save Sodom for the sake of 50 he had boldness to ask for 45 and then 40 and then 35, all the way down to 5. On the basis of God's grace Abraham asked for more grace.

Lay hold on God's grace in prayer. If the Lord answers your prayers and in his grace cures your cancer don't stop. Don't think that's good enough for today. No, God's grace is with you, be bold. Pray, "Lord also heal my child, Lord also heal my marriage, lord also strength my faith, Lord also . . ."

Be bold in your prayers.

This reminds me of the *Shawshank Redemption*. Remember the prison librarian sends letter after letter petitioning money to make the prison library better. He is ignored for years and then finally they send him some money. In response the librarian says, "now I'm going to send letters twice a week."

Be bold in your prayers, when God gives you grace, ask for twice as much. Nothing makes God happier than when His people address him as a loving father with confidence that He will hear and shower us with his blessings.

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; 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; **Colossians 1:9-10**

So Paul is bold. Having received all these blessings, he says I will now pray that you may also receive and here he lists four things

1. Filled with the knowledge of His will
2. Walk worthy in what is pleasing to Him
3. Bearing fruits of good works
4. Increasing in the knowledge of Him

To some degree we can learn His will through the commands He gives us. We have the Ten Commandments. Most of us have learned them. The point is that this is the will of God, this is what is good and right. Do these things.

And that would be great, if 1. We were able to keep them, 2. Our goal was merely to pass.

But we want more don't we. We are already saved. We are already saints. We have been redeemed. Our goal isn't to get into heaven, that is already taken care of. Our goal is to rejoice in Christ. Our goal is to live up to the undeserved grace we have already received. Our goal is to express our thankfulness and our love for Christ. For this goal the law is not sufficient

We want to learn what is His will for our life, what is pleasing to him and to live it. This we learn by getting to know Him.

When my wife and I got married we could have written down a bunch of rules. This would have been sufficient if our goal was to just get along but that would never have sufficed to make a happy marriage. Living together we get to know each other. We learn what makes the other happy. We learn how to live together not just getting along.

So we learn God's will in our life. We learn to hear and respond to the voice of our Good Shepherd, by living in his word. We seek in His word not five points for a better marriage or finical happiness, but when we read his word we are seeking to get to know him better. Knowing Him better will teach us to know His will, it will teach us to "walk worthy in what pleases him"

This is why I always prefer to preach on the Gospel lesson. Certainly we can get knowledge of him from other places. We search even the Old Testament to find out what it tells us about Jesus, but the Gospels are the most direct picture of Christ and who He is.

I always prefer to preach on the Gospel so that you might learn a little bit more who Jesus is, what he has done for you. And notice how Paul's four points are circular. If we get to know him better, we can walk with him better. If we walk with Him better, we will produce fruits. If we produce fruits, we will increase in knowledge. If we increase in knowledge, we will walk. And so it goes around causing us to grow in our faith.

¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; **Colossians 1:11**

This brings us to verse 11, which is the way in which God helps us towards these goal. Yes it is through His word, but it is often suffering and patience that drive us to seek his grace and grow in our faith.

Patient long suffering enduring through His strength that gives us a maturity of faith.

This is the key to all of this, bearing fruit of good works, walking with Christ, increasing in knowledge of him all of this comes through patiently enduring the suffering of this life. How many times haven't we said or thought, "I can't do this anymore, I can't keep going like this." Yet we have the strength of Christ.

Sometime when faced with adversity there is anger and resentment and blame. In this case there is no growth, there is no increase. When we give in to these sinful ways of dealing with suffering, then the suffering is useless it accomplishes nothing.

But when we accept God's will in our life, when we learn how to bear our crosses with long suffering patience, than we grow in His grace. I have seen this in some of you, even in the short time I have been here. The suffering has produced growth, a maturity of faith that is simply almost impossible without suffering.

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. **Colossians 1:12-14**

Why should we continue on even in suffering , what can give us joy even in the suffering of this world? Paul comes back to the great grace of God. We continue on through suffering because of the hope that is set before us. What are more of those gifts;

We have a portion of the inheritance of light.

We have been rescued from darkness and set in the kingdom of His beloved Son.

But above everything else we have redemption through Jesus Christ.

Amen