

A Jesus-shaped life * Colossians 1:9-14

June 5, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

If you've received a birthday card from me in the last year or so, chances are good that you are familiar with the passage of Scripture that we're going to look at this morning because, in the past year or so, I've gotten into the habit of writing this morning's passage into the birthday cards that I send. And not only that, not only do I write this passage into those cards, I've gotten into the habit of praying this passage for you.

And I do that because I think that this is one of the most important prayers in all of the Bible. In a very real sense, praying this prayer is like asking God for our daily bread, because even more than we need bread, we need the things that this prayer asks for every day. So let's take a look at this passage – Colossians 1:9-14 – and we'll see a prayer that I would love for you to pray for yourselves and for each other and for me every day. Colossians 1:9-14.

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (Col 1:9-12 NIV).

I would love for you to pray that for me. I would love for you to pray that for each other.

In Greek, that's one sentence, but in English it breaks down into six prayers, so we have here six very powerful prayers that we can pray in our personal prayer time, prayers that we would do well to incorporate into our own prayer lives. So here's what I want you to do – as we go back over them one by one and think about what these six prayers mean, think of them as prayer requests, items for prayer that you can pray for other people in your lives.

So – first – verse 9 - For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you ...

Now before I say anything else, let me just underline what Paul has said. Paul is writing to the church in Colossae, a group of people that he held close to his heart and what does he say? Since we first heard that you received Jesus with faith, we have not stopped praying for you. Right off the bat, that tells us about the importance of consistency and intentionality in prayer.

We lead busy lives, we have a lot going on and sometimes, prayer is one of the things that gets shoved to the backburner. Or in emergency situations, we throw it in the microwave just to speed things up, but then back on the back burner it goes. I would love for you to pray for others like Paul does – consistently, regularly, intentionally. Every day, bring your friends and neighbours and loved ones to the Lord.

And pray for them something like this – we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Prayer request number one – may God fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Now there's a sense in which this is kind of a redundant prayer. Broadly speaking, we ALREADY know the will of God. 1 Timothy 2:3 – God wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Matthew 28:19 – We are to 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,' ie. 1 John 2:6, followers of Jesus who walk as Jesus did. There's a very real sense in which we know the broadstrokes of God's will for our life and our world.

This prayer though zooms in, fine tunes the focus, to look at the specific details of our lives. God's will is not a 'one-size-fits-all' kind of thing – God's will applies to the unique and individual circumstances that we find ourselves in. We need spiritual insight and understanding to know what that looks like.

For example, what does it look like for you to go and make disciples if you're retired, or if you're working, or if you're a student, or if you're unemployed? It will look different for each of us. What does it look like to walk as Jesus did when you live on a farm or live in a city or with other people or all alone?

It's one thing to know the will of God; it's another altogether to know God's will for 'me'. And so we pray that God would give us the spiritual insight and understanding that we need to accomplish His purposes in the specific details of our lives.

Prayer request number one then is this – May God fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Prayer request number two – verse 10 - 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way... (Col 1:10 NIV).

May you live a life that is worthy of the Lord.

Now this is an idea that you see again and again in the NT. Here in Colossians 1, Paul says 'May you live a life worthy of the Lord;' over in Ephesians 4:1 – 'may you live a life worthy of the calling you have received;' Philippians 1:27, 'whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ;' 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 'I urge you to live lives worthy of God.'

What does that tell us? That tells us that being a follower of Jesus is not some ho-hum thing that we tack on to the end of our lives; it is a high calling. It is a privilege with incredible status and purpose and responsibility.

That much is clear from the verses that come just after today's passage. Verse 12 – Paul says – 'God "...has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:12-14 NIV).

Think about that. We were once separated from God, stumbling around blindly in the darkness of sin. And yet through no merit of our own, God qualified us to become His children and His heirs. We didn't deserve it; He just decided to do it. Because of His love. Because of His mercy. He reached into the

darkness and pulled us out into the light and wiped away our sin and made us His children. 'In Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.' Jesus took a pauper and made a prince. That's a high calling and a calling to live in light of. 'Rights, privileges, and *responsibilities*.'

Imagine for a minute that Serena Allardyce entered herself into the Ancaster Fair Ambassador contest. She's a good country girl and what do you know, she gets selected as the Ancaster Fair Ambassador. And then she goes on to the CNE and what do you, she gets selected as the Ambassador of the Fairs. She's given the opportunity to travel all around Ontario, meet important people, contribute to the growth of agribusiness as the Ambassador of the Fairs.

Now, imagine she gets up at those events and starts advocating for cuts to the agricultural sector. She gets up and says 'look, we need to pave paradise and put up a parking lot. We need to stop the next generation from farming and get them into coding or something. We need to open the market to cheap US imports so that we can all get off the land and into the city.'

Would that be worthy of the calling to which she has been called? No! Of course not! The opportunity to be a fair ambassador is a privilege and an honour and that kind of privilege and honour calls behaviour that is consistent with the values of the ones who gave it. The agricultural society gives the honour of ambassadorship with the intention that the ambassador would represent them to the world; same with us as Christians. God gives us the privilege of being His children with the intention that we would live lives that reflect Him and His goodness to the world. That's why Paul prays: 'may you live a life that is worthy of the Lord.'

And just on a personal note – this is such a foundational idea for my life and faith. I look at what it took God to forgive me, I look at how freely God forgave, I look at how God pulled me out of darkness and gave me purpose and meaning in the light and I want to live up to those blessings. Not to earn God's love, because He already loves me. But to live a life that lives up to the blessings that I've received.

So prayer request number 2 – may we live lives that are worthy of the Lord.

Now, you might wonder, what does that look like? What would it look like for me to live a life that is 'worthy of the Lord?'

The rest of the prayers I think answer that question, painting a picture for us of what a life worthy of the Lord looks like. Prayer number 2 says 'May you live a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing to Him in every way;' prayer number 3 says (verse 10) may you bear fruit in every good work.

A life that is worthy of the Lord will bear fruit in keeping with the character of God.

John 15 I think is helpful here – remember – I am the vine, you are the branches; anyone who remains in me will bear much fruit. The point is that we as children of God would give ourselves to the task of bearing good fruit – doing things to bless and to help other people. Pretty straightforward.

And – grammar nerd alert – the verb form that Paul uses is a participle – remember participles? Running, jumping, flying, skipping – participles are all about ongoing action – Paul prays here that we would not just do good things every once in a while because good things are nice to do; Paul is praying that as we stay connected to Jesus, our lives would inevitably and consistently bear fruit out of the

overflow of our time spent with Jesus. Prayer request number three then is this – may we bear fruit in every good deed; may we continuously and ongoingly give ourselves to doing good.

Prayer request number four – again, verse 10 – may you grow in the knowledge of God – and actually, this is also a participle – so really the prayer here is – ‘may you keep on growing in the knowledge of God, coming to know Him better and better every day.’ We’ve already prayed that God would give us insight into His will; now we’re praying that God would give us insight into His character, that we would know Him more personally and more deeply for ourselves.

You know, I’ve never understood people who think they’ve got God all figured out; they reach a certain point and then say ‘Yep, I got it.’ I’ve been following Jesus for twenty years, I’ve been to seminary, I’ve read my Bible to the point that the cover’s fallen off (twice!); and yet I feel like I’ve only scratched the surface.

And yet, I want to go deeper, I want to know Him better, because this is the sovereign creator, the one who redeemed me from darkness and made me His child. And so of course, my prayer for myself and for you is that we would keep on growing in the knowledge of God.

Prayer request number four – may you grow in the knowledge of God; prayer five – ‘may you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience’ (Col 1:11 NIV). Again, this is a participle, so, ‘may the very power of God strengthen you day by day so that you will have great endurance and patience.’

This I think so many times is the daily bread we need. I have prayed this so many times for you. You’re going through a rough time – a death or a struggle or a difficult situation – and this is what I pray for. May God, with all of His infinite power, graciously give you that supernatural power and you may have the patience you need to endure. God doesn’t always help us out of difficult circumstances, but He helps us through them, and it’s through those trials that we are refined, and so this is a vital prayer – may you be strengthened with all the power of God for endurance and patience.

And finally, prayer request number six, may you joyfully give thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

And, yes, it’s a participle, so may you continually and joyfully give thanks to the Lord for all that He has done. He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness, He has made us co-heirs with Christ, destined to receive the glorious inheritance of eternal life – let that overflow as thanksgiving in your life. And may God enable you to do so, as you live a life that is worthy of Him.

So, six powerful prayers and prayers that I hope that you will pray both for yourself and for other people.

Now, just to pull it all together, I want to give you one big idea that I think lies at the heart of this prayer. There are six prayers but I think they all ask the same thing – May we live Jesus-shaped lives. Think about those six prayers; I think they’re all getting at that one idea – God, may you help me to live a Jesus-shaped life.

Now here’s what I mean, and notice that you can take this in two ways.

In one sense, the six powerful prayers say ‘God, help me to live a life that looks like Jesus.’ Wile E Coyote runs through a brick wall and you see his shape left in the wall? The prayer here is that we too would look like Jesus in our lives – lives in the shape of Jesus. That we would walk as Jesus did, that we would bear the same kind of fruit as Jesus did, that we would be strengthened by the same divine power that strengthened Him and raised Him from the dead. The prayer here is that we would look like Jesus in all that we do; that when people see us, they will see an expression/incarnation/manifestation of what Jesus looks like, through the unique personality traits and circumstances that are specific to us. So, may you live a Jesus-shaped life (that looks like Jesus).

And may you live a Jesus-shaped life, one that is shaped by what He has done. What motivates you to do what you do? What motivates you to do good things, to come to church, to be a good neighbour? Is it the sense that it’s a nice thing to do? Or is it the reality that Jesus has scooped you out of the kingdom of darkness, deposited you the kingdom of light, and given you the promise of eternal glory?

God has poured out on a blessing that is greater than any other we will ever experience; live a life that is worthy of that blessing, joyfully giving thanks for that blessing, growing to know your Saviour more and more. May the contours and priorities of your life be shaped by the things that Jesus has already done. May your heart be moved and motivated by the love that Jesus has for you so that you will look like Jesus in all that you do.

May you live a Jesus-shaped life.

Now as we close, I want to share one more thought and it’s this. Birthday cards are not the only things I’ve written this prayer on. When we dedicate children here at Langford, I frame a printout of a verse and give it to that child as a prayer for their lives. There are frames with this verse in it in some of your homes. And I do that because this is a prayer that can shape a life. Imagine you prayed this prayer even once a week for someone for all their lives. There’s no telling what God could do through a person like that.

So take this prayer and treat it like prayer requests. Pray these prayers for yourself, for your children, for your friends. Ask God for what we truly need – a life that understands and is shaped by His sacrificial love.

May you live a Jesus-shaped life.

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

BENEDICTION

2 Corinthians 13:11 - Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.