



The Sermon

Dr. Steven J. Lawson

Colossians 1:9-12

"A Prayer for Spiritual Maturity"

April 23, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

Well, I'm thrilled you're here, I'm thrilled I'm here, and we're all here together. So let me close in a word of – no, we've got a great passage today. And if you'd take your Bible, Colossians chapter 1, Colossians chapter 1, we're going to be looking at verses 9 through 12. If you're new to Trinity Bible Church of Dallas, we are in a verse by verse study of the book of Colossians. That's the way we study the Bible and preach the Bible, because that's how God wrote the Bible; and we just move verse by verse, and we want the full counsel of God. We don't skip over any verses, we don't dodge the controversial verses – and the Bible is extremely controversial – and we preach the whole truth.

And today we find ourselves in Colossians 1:9-12. The title of this message is "A Prayer for Spiritual Maturity." I think you'll find this to be a very relevant, very practical section of Scripture for your Christian life. I want to begin as always by reading this passage, Colossians 1 beginning in verse 9, and I want to draw to your attention even right now, this is one long sentence. And not to get too technical before I even read this, the subject is "we," the verb is "not cease, pray, and ask," and everything else that follows is an elongated sentence with all kinds of supporting statements. The apostle Paul can pack more into a verse than I think anyone else in the Bible. And so this is so rich, and there's so much here. Let me just begin by reading this, beginning in verse 9.

"For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light." What a statement of the apostle Paul praying for the church in Colossae. Let's go to the Lord now in prayer before we look more carefully at this passage.

[Prayer] Father, as always, we approach Your Word with great reverence, with a teachable spirit, with a humble heart, with a ready soul to receive the truth that You have recorded in Your Word for us. And I pray that this which was written two thousand years ago would be so fresh and so relevant for our Christian lives today that it will have great impact and influence upon us. So may we drink in these verses, and may we be transformed by them. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

In these verses that I have just read to you the apostle Paul lays bare his heart, he pulls back the veil of his soul, and he tells the church at Colossae that "I'm praying for you. I'm praying constantly for you." And he goes so far as to tell them what he is praying for them. And as he does that, this really becomes, really, an overlay to teach us how to pray for one another. So as Paul prayed for the church at Colossae, this is how we should pray for one another.

And how encouraged they must have been to learn that the apostle Paul is praying constantly for us. Paul was arguably the greatest Christian who ever lived; and to have Paul like a rifle shot narrowing down his prayers to include this church in Colossae must have been an enormous support to them. In fact, we could say this, that whatever progress and spiritual maturity that they experienced in their Christian life from this point forward can be traced back in part to these prayers that Paul is praying for the church at Colossae.

I think the same is true for your spiritual life and for my spiritual life, that we are growing by the grace of God, for one reason is because others have been praying, and others are praying for us. The Lord Jesus Christ is praying for us right now. He's seated at the right hand of God the Father. And the book of Hebrews says, "He ever lives to make intercession for us." Right now He is pleading with the Father for your spiritual life, that you would be sustained and strengthened as you walk with the Lord. And the success of your Christian life is because the Savior is praying for you. The same can be said of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Romans chapter 8 it says that "He is praying for us with groanings too deep for words, as the Father knows what's in the heart of the Spirit, and words don't even need to be spoken as the Spirit is intensely, fervently praying for us.

The same could be said for many of us that our godly parents prayed for us. I can remember when I was in college and my father telling me he is praying for my spiritual life, and that the Lord kept me on a straight and narrow path while I was in college, in large measure could surely be traced back to my father's prayers for me, and my mother's prayers for me. Many of us are advancing in our Christian lives because our spouse is praying for us, because our friends are praying for us, our elders and our teachers are praying for us. And so prayer is a mighty force that God uses as a means of grace so that we will grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must never underestimate the importance of prayer in our spiritual development.

And so as we come to this prayer as Paul records what it is that he is praying for the Colossians, it really becomes - let me put it this way - a model prayer. People sometimes come up and ask me after the service, "How can I pray for you, Dr. Lawson?" and my standard stock answer is this: "Take one of these prison prayers by Paul and pray this for me. You could not be any more on target with your prayers for me than to take one of these prison prayers and personalize it in your prayer for me."

There are four prison prayers as Paul is in Rome in his first Roman imprisonment, the year 60 to 62; he's there for two long years. We have two of these prayers in the book of Ephesians: one in chapter 1, and the other in

chapters 3. We also have one in the book of Philippians that's in chapter 1, and then this one here is in Colossians chapter 1. And so this is a great way to learn how to pray is to take these prison prayers.

And maybe you're like me sometimes; as you pause and as you pray so that your prayers are very effective and on target, one great way to pray is to take Scripture and to pray verse by verse through certain portions of Scripture. The Psalms are wonderful for that. This prison prayer is wonderful for that. Here's how a husband can pray for his wife, a wife can pray for her husband. Here's how parents can pray for their children, here's how grandparents can pray for their grandchildren. Here's how elders can pray for the flock, and the flock for the elders.

So let's walk through this, because this is so helpful for our Christian life. And what Paul prioritizes in these four verses should really be dominant in our prayer life. And what we have really here is almost like a kaleidoscope of some important features about Christian living. Well, enough said for the introduction, let's step into the text.

And there are six things, six priorities that Paul establishes in this one elongated sentence, and the first thing that he prays for is for "spiritual knowledge, spiritual knowledge." That's in verse 9. And everything good – let me make this statement – everything good in the Christian life always begins with the mind, with a renewed mind. And that's where Paul begins his prayers here for these believers is with their minds.

And so, verse 9, "For this reason also," and that refers back to verse 8, the favorable report that he received from Epaphras, who has come from Colossae to Paul in Rome and bringing an update on the church, and so he says, "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it," – since the day he heard of their conversion and their now walk with the Lord, Paul says – "we have not ceased to pray for you."

Now as Paul writes this, he's imprisoned, and there is this sense in which he has a lot of time on his hands. He's in house arrest. He is chained to the praetorian guard, the elite Roman soldiers from Caesar's household; he's witnessing to them. He's writing four books; he is writing at this time Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. But he has a lot of time, and he is interceding, and he is praying. How wise of a use of time it is to pray for others.

And Paul says, "and to ask," and specifically this is what he asks: "let there be light." And there was no light. So, this is what he prays, "that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will." That is so critically important for my spiritual life, for your spiritual life. Life is too short to be lived outside of the will of God. I don't want to be like Israel in the wilderness just going in circles and getting nowhere and my life not accomplishing anything. For my life to be on track I've got to know the will of God. You must know the will of God for your life.

When he says, "that you may be filled," the imagery here is not like an empty cup and a pitcher of water and filling up an empty cup with water; that's not the proper use of this word *pléroō*. It means to be governed and to be controlled by the knowledge of His will. In other words, not for it to be just in your head, but for it to be in your heart, and for it to control your steps, and to control your mouth, and to control your attitudes. You've got to be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

When he says "knowledge" here, you just need to know this, that in the original language it is what we call a compound word, meaning two words merged together, and the main root word is "knowledge"; but what doesn't come through in the English translation is there's a preposition put at the beginning of this root word, and what the meaning is that you would be filled with the deep and thorough knowledge of God, not just a superficial knowledge, but a knowledge that has really pierced and penetrated down into the depths of your soul. Paul says, "That's what I'm praying for you, that you will be governed and controlled by a deep knowledge of God's will."

Now when we speak of God's will in the Bible, or when the Bible speaks of God's will - I don't speak in place of the Bible - the Bible speaks of God's will in a twofold way. First, there's God's sovereign will. Everything that comes to pass is a part of His eternal decree, that before the foundation of the world, God became the architect of His eternal purpose and plan; and there is no Plan B, and there is no Plan C, and in the eternal decree and sovereign will of God it included the fall of Lucifer from heaven, a third of the angels being cast down to become demons. It included Adam's sin, it included the temptation, it included the curse, it includes spiritual warfare, it includes everything that comes to pass. That's God's sovereign will. It is immutable, it is irrevocable, it is predestined, to use a good Bible word. That's God's sovereign will.

You don't have to pray for God's sovereign will; it's going to be done. And that's secretive. None of us have ever looked into that book. There's only been one author, and that is God; and God with His own hand has recorded human history down to the most minute detail before it ever comes to pass, and it is His secret will. And there's only a few little places where God has pulled back the veil and allowed us to kind of peer in, and that is through prophecy and what will take place at the end of the age, and what will take place in the millennial kingdom, and what will take place in the eternal state. That's going to happen, and we know what will happen in that instance.

But that's not the reference here when he says, "the knowledge of His will." He's not referring to God's secretive, eternal, sovereign will. The other aspect of the will of God is what we call "His revealed will"; and His revealed will is found in pages of Scripture. And here in the Bible we see His commandments that we are to follow, and they point us into the will of God. And we see biblical examples of the saints, that we are to imitate their faith, and we see Proverbs, and we see principles that help guide and direct us into the knowledge of God's will. That's the reference that Paul has here, that "I do not cease to pray and to ask God that you will be in the grip of the knowledge, the deep, thorough knowledge of the revealed will of God."

That's what each one of us needs today, and it's found in pages of Scripture. So the better you know God's Word, the better you know God's will. You need to write that down. I like that sentence. "The better you know God's Word, the better you know God's will," because God's Word is like the hand on a compass; it's always pointing north into the very center of God's will for your life.

Now he has two words after this which are critically important, which is the word "wisdom and understanding." Do you see that there, "wisdom and understanding"? So you need the knowledge of His will, but not just alone; you need two, in essence, twin sisters to go with this knowledge. You need all spiritual wisdom.

Now what is wisdom? Wisdom: literally the word means skillful or skill, and it means to live a skillful life where you know how to take the knowledge and apply it to your life. It's one thing to have it in your head, and it's one thing for it to penetrate down into the depths of your heart and your soul, it's something else for it to point you in specific life situations to know how the Word of God is to address this situation; that's wisdom. In a word, it's application, it's the application of the knowledge of His will to real life situations, okay?

So, what's understanding? Well, understanding is penetrating insight into these life situations so that you can assess the situation and size up the situation, so that wisdom can then go to the treasure vault of the knowledge of His will and take just the right passages of Scripture and Scripture truth, and with understanding you see into this situation, and with wisdom you can apply it to this situation. All three are necessary. Knowledge must never travel alone, knowledge must always be accompanied by wisdom and understanding; and that's exactly what Paul is praying for the church in Colossae, and that is exactly what you and I need in our spiritual lives. It's the Word of God, it's the truths of Scripture. Now for the church at Colossae, they had the whole Old Testament. The book of James was written first, it's already been written; the book of Galatians has already been written; and there was also the apostles' teaching that they have that will

eventually be put into the other books of the New Testament; but it's the Word of God that directs us into the knowledge of His will.

I think of Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." I mean, we live in a dark world, do we not, and we live in a maze, and it's hard to know how to navigate ourselves through this, really, morally insane world, and the complexity of all of the doors that are open and closed, and opportunities, and this and that; how do we know what to do? Well, the word of God is like a lantern and it sheds light on the path in front of us; and we follow the light, because the light of Scripture is leading us into the knowledge of God's will.

I want to say again, life's too short to be lived outside of the will of God. Your life will not amount to anything if you're outside of the will of God. So the first thing he prays for is for spiritual knowledge; and that's really where it begins. And let me just say this by way quickly of just a footnote. This is the way the Christian life works: mind, heart or affections or desires, and then will - those three - and it works in that order. Everything begins with the mind, the truth that you study and come to the knowledge of God's will. You cannot get there from here if you don't have the knowledge of God's will, you have no idea where you're even going. The knowledge of the mind must now affect the heart for there to be an excitement for this truth and a desire for this truth; and your heart now begins to beat with excitement, and your desire is to follow what your mind now knows.

That then leads to the will, and it is the heart that activates the will, the choices that you make. Every choice that you will make for the rest of your life is directly the result of your affections and your heart. That was the whole thesis of Jonathan Edwards' landmark book *Religious Affections*, as he tries to describe the Great Awakening that was taking place in the 1730s and 1740s. And religious affections, it's that true religion is in the heart. It starts in the head, but it must inflame the heart with religious affections; and the will is simply the handmaiden of the heart. Your will never go contrary to your heart.

R. C. Sproul gives this illustration: "Someone may say, 'Well, what about you're walking down the street and you've got a few dollar bills in your pocket, and someone comes up with a gun and says, "Give me your money, or I'll take your life." And so you pull out those dollar bills and give it to the robber.' See there, you did something contrary to your heart." And Sproul argues, "No, you didn't. Your heart wanted to save your own life. You valued your own life more than two one dollar bills. It's always your heart that is the rudder of the ship; and the will simply precedes out of the heart; but it's the mind that is feeding the heart." The better you know God's Word, the better you know God's will.

Now we need to proceed, you're not listening fast enough. So, second, as we come to verse 10, he also prays for "spiritual growth." Spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and understanding must lead to spiritual action. It's not enough just to know what to do, you've got to do it. Understand this: knowledge is never an end in itself, knowledge is only a means to accomplish the goal. The goal is to live for the glory of God. The goal is not to be filled with knowledge, but we need knowledge if we are to live for the glory of God. We need sound doctrine, we need theology; but it's never the destination, it's only the super highway to get us to the destination.

And so he says in verse 10, to begin verse 10, "so that," and so this introduces what we call a purpose clause. Here's the purpose for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, "so that you" – believers – "may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects." That's the purpose of knowledge. That's the purpose of wisdom and understanding is so that you will walk the narrow path that leads to life and that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, so that you will walk in a manner that pleases God.

So when he says, "so that you will walk," that's a metaphor, it's a figure of speech for our daily conduct. "Walk" implies your feet are on the ground, you're connected to the circumstances and the life here upon the earth; it's progressive, it's lived one step at a time, it requires energy and effort on your part, it requires discernment and the knowledge of God's will on your part. I mean, this metaphor of "walk" is used commonly by Paul in his

writings. And so he says, "Here's what I'm praying for you, that you will walk, that you'll live your life where the rubber meets the road, in a certain way, in a manner worthy of the Lord." Now this clearly implies that you could live your life in a way that is unworthy of the Lord, that displeases the Lord.

So what does this word "manner" mean? It really is the picture of scales; like there's a central stem and there are two saucers and they're on a bar. And a woman would go into the marketplace and ask for some grain, and the merchant would pull out the scales and put a weight on one side of the dish proportionate to how much wheat or grain she wants. And then on the other side into this dish he would pour out of his bag enough grain such that the scales are in balance. And that's actually what the word "righteousness" means.

But in this case, the imagery here is that you would walk in such a way that your profession of faith in Jesus Christ is on one dish and the practice of your life is on the other dish, that your walk would match your talk, that your behavior would match your beliefs, that your conduct would match your confession. When that takes place, you're walking worthy of the Lord.

Now none of us can live perfect, that's obvious; but nevertheless, there needs to be this progressive, this beginning to match up closer and closer, and it is this: when your behavior matches your beliefs, that's pleasing to the Lord. That's what it says here, "in a manner worthy of the Lord to please Him." Isn't that in our heart today as Christians? Don't we want to please the Lord? Don't we want to bring pleasure to the Lord as He observes our Christian life?

The word "please" here refers to moral excellence that pleases Him. And that's in the heart of every Christian. There is a sense in which God cannot love us anymore, and He cannot love us any less, because He loves us perfectly, okay. He's loved us from all eternity past. But within that, there are times in your life and in my life when we please the Lord, and other times when we displease the Lord. And when we pursue the knowledge of

His will, that pleases the Lord; and when we go our own way and have our own agenda, that displeases the Lord. Doesn't affect His love for us, but it does affect what pleases Him or displeases Him.

And then he adds these three words, "in all respects." Do you see that? And so that's a comprehensive statement, "all respects." In other words, every area of our life must be lived in a manner worthy of the Lord: my personal life, my home life, my business life, my school life, my recreational life, my financial life, my ministry life, my church life. There's no part of my life that can be detached over here separated from my walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. The entirety of my life, the entirety of my life has to be lived in the revealed will of God.

And so Paul is praying for them, not just that they will be filled with the knowledge of His will, but they'll put it into practice, that they will walk in this God-pleasing manner.

I've said this to you before but it's worth repeating: if we please God, it does not matter who we displease; and if we displease God, it does not matter who we please. In this sense, the Christian life is very simple: please God. As you make decisions for your life, the governing principle is what pleases God, not necessarily what pleases you or pleases someone else. What pleases God, what glorifies God the most; that's the path to take.

Well, there's a third element, a third priority for which Paul is praying, and it's for "spiritual fruit." And as verse 10 continues, he says, "bearing fruit in every good work," that as we proceed down this path of the knowledge of God's will and as we are walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, the result of that is that we are bearing fruit in every good work. We cannot bear fruit in every good work if we're out of the will of God. We cannot bear fruit in every good work if we are failing to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. So there is the succession of thought here, a layering out, a prioritizing what comes first, then second.

And so now, really, the result of what we've already considered is we will be bearing fruit. Now what's important to note is we do not produce fruit. Only God can produce fruit, we simply bear fruit. The branch doesn't produce fruit, it's the vine that produces the fruit; the branch simply bears the fruit, right? And so when we are in alignment with God in His will, walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, then God begins to produce fruit in our lives; and this fruit in this context I think really carries the idea that our spiritual lives would be productive, that there would be a return on investment, that we would see successful results as God defines success, that as we live our Christian lives, we would have a positive effect on others in this world.

First Corinthians 16:15 speaks of new converts as fruit. We would see people coming to know Christ as a result of our lives: our children, our grandchildren, our neighbors, our friends. That's fruit from our lives. And there would also be the building up of others, the edifying of others. Romans 1:13, Paul says he wants to come to Rome to the saints there to obtain some fruit from them. That's a positive ministry of edification and building them up. And so we see that, really, the qualification to bear fruit in our lives, to live a productive Christian life is that we have the knowledge of God's will, with wisdom and understanding, and that we would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord to please Him in every respect.

There's a fourth priority that we see here as this continues to layer out and it's also in verse 10, and it's for, what I want to call, is for "spiritual depth." It could be for spiritual intimacy, but I like the word "depth," because he continues to say, "and" - so it's inseparably connected with this bearing of fruit that proceeded - "and increasing" - that means growing and becoming greater in the knowledge of God. This word "knowledge" here is the same compound word that was used in verse 9 for knowledge, which I told you means not just knowledge, not just bare facts, but a deep, thorough, intimate, personal knowledge of God.

In verse 9, the reference was "to the knowledge of God's will." In verse 10 here, it is "to the knowledge of God Himself." That's real spiritual maturity as you grow to know the Lord, as you grow deeper and deeper in the Lord.

Probably the greatest compliments, words of encouragement I've ever received after I preach is to go out to the front door and someone say not, "That was a great sermon," but, "God is just becoming bigger and bigger and bigger every time I come to church. I don't know what I used to think God is and who God is, but God's getting bigger. His holiness, His sovereignty, His righteousness, His mercy, His grace, His truth, His immutability, His omnipresence, His omnipotence, His wrath, His love – my head is almost about to burst with such a high, transcendent, majestic understanding of who God is."

That's the idea here: increasing in the knowledge of God. The moment you're regenerated, born again, and the moment you're converted, you know God. John 17:3, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the one true living God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." We immediately enter into a personal relationship with God when we're converted, and we know God intimately, personally. We don't just know about God, "I now know God, not just facts in my head, but the reality in my heart." That's what it is to be saved.

But that's only the beginning. I mean, it's just like marriage. You thought you knew your spouse – you should have listened to your mother – you thought you knew your spouse, but you just grow and grow and grow to know the other person as if, "I almost didn't even know you when we were married." Same thing spiritually, only ten thousand times ten thousand more. And none of us have arrived at the height or the depth or the breadth or the length of the knowledge of God. It'd be easier for you to put your arm around the globe than for you to scale the heights of heaven and to know God for who He truly is in the fullness of His eternal being. We've only put our little pinky into the Pacific Ocean of the knowledge of God.

And so Paul is praying for this church, not that you'll have better programs; that you'll have a better knowledge of God. You may not even need programs if you have a better knowledge and increase knowledge of God. J. I. Packer wrote a book a number of years ago: *Knowing God*. He was an English theologian; and that book about 50 years ago hit the shores of the

United States like a spiritual tsunami. It reintroduced us to what is primary: the attributes and the perfections of God.

R. C. Sproul told me on more than one occasion, "Steve, it's the knowledge of God that becomes the ultimate paradigm through which you see everything else. It's the ultimate paradigm through which you interpret Scripture and see Scripture. It's the ultimate paradigm for a Christian worldview." It's the ultimate paradigm to even understand Christology, which is the theology of Christ' pneumatology, the theology of the Holy Spirit; anthropology, the study of man; soteriology, especially the theology of salvation. You've got to know who God is to make sense of anything with any profundity, with any depth. And that's what Paul is praying for this church. You know what you and I both need together? We just need to keep increasing in the knowledge of God.

Now very quickly, my time is slipping away. Verse 11 is the fifth priority, and it's for "spiritual strength." And I hope you're seeing through all of this that, this is so real to the Christian life, that this really is fine-tuning our understanding of what's important to live a dynamic Christian life, these things for which Paul is praying. Listen, this book is only four chapters. He's not wasting any space. There's no filler verses in this book. And to have this many verses on what he's praying for the church at Colossae underscores for us what is extremely important for us to understand, really, what is the epicenter of Christian living.

So in verse 11 he prays for spiritual strength. Notice, verse 11, "strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might." Stop right there. Look at these words he's stacking up. "Strengthened," that's a Greek word that comes into the English language as dynamite, *dunamoó*, and really, "dynamic." It's in a verb form here, and it means to be empowered supernaturally to do the will of God. We can't do the will of God in our own strength. It's been well said: the Christian life's not hard, it's impossible. It cannot be lived in our own strength. You can't take one step forward in walking in a manner worthy of your calling in your own strength, it can only be done by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit who indwells you.

And let me just tell you this: God will never call you to do anything, but that He will give you the power to do it. Sometimes we'll ask people in the church would they serve in a certain capacity, and they go, "I just don't think I can do that." Well, the real question is not whether you can do it or can't do it, the real question is, "Is God calling you to do this?" because if God is calling you to do this, He will give you the power to do it.

So, "strengthened with all power." Note the word "all." God's not measuring out power with an eyedropper to help us live the Christian life, He's opened floodgates of His omnipotence, the very power that raised Christ from the dead, the very power that said, "Let there be light," and there was light, is the power He's channeling into our Christian lives to live in a manner worthy of the Lord. Also the word "power" is the same root word as strengthened. So the idea really, Paul is intentionally almost stuttering here: it's power upon power, layers of power. Not just a facade of power; but all the power you could ever need to do the will of God, He provides.

And then he adds, "according to His glorious might." The power that He gives us is not power drawn from this world, it's not drawn from motivational speakers, it's not drawn from whatever meetings, it's not drawn from worldly wisdom; no, it's according to His glorious might, the omnipotence of God Himself.

And so what's the purpose for all this strength and power? Well, I've already alluded to it; but he becomes more specific here in what follows toward the end of verse 11. He says, "for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience." Steadfastness: what does that mean? Well, it's another compound word - two words, that means two words merge together to form one word in the original language - and it literally means remaining under, remaining under. And the implication is, then in the challenges of life in the will of God, God gives you strength and power to hang in there, to nail your feet to the floor, to not go AWOL, to not want to back out the back door and go look for an easier place, that if this is within the will of God - and there will be storms, and there will be trials in the will of God - God will

give you the steadfastness to hang in there. We could put it this way: staying power, hanging tough in tough times.

When I was in college I was a long way from home; and I'd been kind of a mama's boy and pampered and spoiled, which was a great way to grow up; and my father counterbalanced all that, trust me. But my dad used to always tell me when I was out at school, "Stay in the saddle. Stay in the saddle." That just means, "Don't jump off; you stay right there where God has you." And that's what Paul is praying for the church at Colossae: steadfastness, staying power. Anybody can bolt and run; it takes someone endowed with supernatural strength to be steadfast.

And then he has the word "patience" – do you see that? – "and patience." And these really are almost overlapping terms. The word "patience," the picture here is not of someone sitting at a bus station out on the curb waiting for the bus to come by or waiting for the DART to come by, and it's running late, and you're just kind of tapping your foot, and your wife says, "You've got to be patient and wait, wait, and it'll finally come." That's not the picture here. This word means long-suffering, in the midst of suffering. It means staying put in the will of God no matter how difficult it is, not giving up, not giving in, not throwing in the towel. You're going to eat the towel before you throw in the towel, because God is with you. If this is the will of God, then for God's sake stay there. It is possible, of course, to go from one city to another, to move and to go from one job to another; but I think we're too often prone to bolt and run when God is trying to teach us endurance, patience, *makrothumia*, bearing up, long-suffering in the midst of suffering. I don't know how this applies to your life, but I'm certain it applies to every one of us here today in one way or another.

I've got one last priority here, it's at the very end of verse 11 and it extends into verse 12, and Paul prays for "spiritual gratitude," that they would just be a very thankful people. So he says, "joyously, giving thanks." The emphasis here is not on joy, the emphasis is upon giving thanks. "Joyously" is an adverb that modifies the verb "giving thanks." The focus is on giving thanks. And as you give thanks, to do it with a joyful heart, expressing gratitude to God for all that is taking place.

You know, Jesus was very thankful. I don't have time to go through all the verses that I've got here in my notes: Matthew 15:36, Luke 22:17 and then verse 19, John 11:41. There's multiple verses of Jesus. In fact, Jesus is saying, "Father, I thank You that You do always hear Me when I pray." When He has to do the Lord's Supper, He gave thanks to God for the bread, He gave thanks to God for the cup. When He fed the five thousand with just those little meager loaves and fish, He gave thanks for virtually nothing, and then multiplied it.

You and I need to be very thankful people. It's so easy for us to be sucked into the world and be unthankful. Philippians 2:14, here's a verse to put on your refrigerator: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." Someone asked one wife, "Do you ever wake up grumpy?" She said, "No, I always let him sleep in."

So one of the marks of our spiritual maturity is we go through life, the glass is not half empty, it's half full, and we are thankful for a half full glass, okay? And Paul's praying for them, that they not be sucked into this death-spiral of whining and complaining. And I think sometimes we can do it almost in a manipulative way by sharing with people what's going on in our life in the form of asking for prayer; and that's all good and fine, but there needs to be some more thanksgiving put into this as well.

So, "giving thanks" - please notice - "to the Father." Our prayers go to the Father through the Son by the Spirit. When we pray, Jesus said, "Don't pray to Me, pray to the Father in My name, and He will give you the request that you make." So, "to the Father, who has qualified us" - means has made us fit - "to share in" - it means have a portion in - "the inheritance" - that means the legacy - "of the saints" - that means holy ones - "in Light." - that refers to the knowledge of God and holiness in Christ who is the Light of the world. That's as fast as I can do that verse.

Listen, the world can't give thanks; they hadn't been qualified to receive the inheritance of the saints in Light. In the truest sense, only we can give

thanks. I mean, can an atheist give thanks? Who's he going to thank? There's no one to thank. So let us be thankful people. This is what Paul prayed for the church at Colossae. It is a great roadmap for your prayers, for my prayers. It's a great punch list. It's a great bullet pointed agenda to follow in how to pray for others, how to pray for yourself, to be right on target. And as I said, life is so short; it's so short we don't even have time to waste where our prayers are off target. Our prayers need to be on target; and these are prayers that are on target.

Now as I bring this to conclusion, I want to speak to some of you here today who have never yet come to the place where you have committed your life to Jesus Christ. You've been around Christians, you've been in church, and that's all great; but you've never gotten out of the boat and into the water. You've never got out of the grandstands and onto the field. You've never repented of your sins and turned back to the world and turn to Jesus Christ and committed your life to Him, to Jesus Christ: the Son of God, the Son of Man, virgin-born, sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection - Jesus who died upon the cross bearing our sins. That is your only hope for acceptance before God. And you will be utterly rejected by God if you have rejected His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

But today is a glorious day. Today is a day of opportunity. Today could be a day of salvation for you. Today could be the greatest day of your life. Today could be the pivotal moment of your entire existence. Today could be the day when you finally make the decision, "I'm going to be a follower of Jesus Christ."

If that's where you are, then don't delay. The Bible says, "Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, today is the day of salvation." The Bible says, "Boast not yourself of tomorrow, for you know not what a day may bring forth." The Bible says, "To him who knows to do right and does it not, to him it is sin."

If you put it off, your heart is just becoming harder and harder; it's not becoming softer and softer, it's becoming harder and harder. And however

difficult it might be for you at this moment to make this all-important decision, it's going to be twice as hard tomorrow and three times harder next week, and there reaches a point when the Holy Spirit will no longer bring deep conviction to bring you into the kingdom. No, there is an appointed time; and today could be that a point of time for you. And so if you've never stepped out of the darkness and into the light, if you've never stepped out of the world and come to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, today is the day. Today's the day.

So I invite you, as an ambassador of Christ representing the King of kings, to this day say an everlasting yes to Jesus Christ. Come to Him by faith. Embrace Him as your Lord and as your Savior; and He will wash away your sins, He will clothe you with His perfect righteousness, He will come and live inside of you, and you will have taken the very first step into the knowledge of His will. It be a glorious day. If you would do this, the angels in heaven would sing. Zephaniah 3:17 says God Himself would sing with delight that "this son of Mine that was lost is now found, this son of Mine that was dead is now alive." God would call for a robe to be brought, the robe of His righteousness; and He would clothe you. God would put sandals on your feet. God would call for a celebration in heaven. He would kill the fatted calf. There would be such excitement and glory if you would commit your life to Jesus Christ. And there would be such excitement and joy in your own heart, the relief of the heavy weight of sin rolled off your back. The nakedness of your transgressions would be covered, you would be washed in the blood of Christ, and you would be made clean as a pure, driven snow.

God says, "Come, let us reason together," says the Lord; "though your sins be a scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool." There is no greater invitation that could ever be extended to you; but you must accept it, you must act upon it, you must believe. And no one else can believe for you, you alone must make this all-important commitment of your life to Christ. If you've never done it, there may never be a greater opportunity than this very moment. This could be your time with God today. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father in heaven, we rise up and we praise You and we bless Your name. You are the great God who saves. You are the great God who forgives. You are the great God who cleans the slate and pardons sin. Lord, do that here today in our midst, in Jesus' name. Amen.