

## Colossians 1:11-14 - A Guide for Prayer - Part 2

If you remember from a couple a weeks ago, this opening section of Colossians is all the apostle Paul's prayer for the church in the small town of Colossae. And as I mentioned before, this prayer is very much a prayer that we can pattern our own prayers after as we pray for other believers. This prayer, like many of the prayers we see in the Bible, are given to us as an example of how to pray to God.

And while Paul doesn't necessarily say "pray like this," when we put this prayer side by side with other prayers in his letters we notice that many of these features are common in his prayers. So I think it's safe to say that if you don't know how to pray for someone, this is a good place to start. And if you're already praying for others these might be some good elements to include.

Last time we looked at **Vss. 9-10** and we saw that Paul was compelled to pray for the Colossian believers because he had heard of their conversion. They had turned from their sin and had trusted in Christ alone and that prompted him to turn to God earnestly in prayer. Living out the Christian life is not easy and we should be diligent to pray for those around us.

And the first thing we saw was that he prayed for these young believers to be filled with the knowledge of God's will. In this context, I think God's will is how to conduct ourselves in very difficult situations that aren't black and white and require a lot of careful thought. I would say the most difficult aspect of the Christian life isn't obeying clear and obvious commands in Scripture, but walking in obedience when there are no clear commands. That takes wisdom that is given by the Holy Spirit and informed by the Word of God.

But knowledge, just all by itself, is pretty much useless. If you and I were flying somewhere and we got on the plane and I stepped into the cockpit and said, "I'm just going to sit up here where all the buttons and controls are so I can fly us to where we're going" - you might be a little concerned. "Have you ever flown before?" "No, but I've seen it done a thousand times - I know what I'm doing." You'd probably step right back off the plane, wouldn't you? Why? I've got the knowledge. What do I lack? The ability to use that knowledge.

Knowledge is not enough. You need the ability - the power - to do what you know. That's really the second thing that Paul prays for here. He prays that they would have God-given power to live out their God-given knowledge. **Read 11**

So Paul prays that they would be strengthened. Now, think about that wording for just a minute. When we're talking about verbs that's called a passive verb - it's something that happens to us rather than something we do. Think of a gas tank: a gas tank doesn't fill itself up. A gas tank is filled by someone else. That's the language Paul uses here in terms of

power: May you be strengthened with all power. He doesn't say "go get strong" or "be strong." He asks that they may be strengthened.

So the question is: strengthened by who? By God.

You know what he's doing? He's asking God to supply the strength that these believers need in order to live obediently in complex situations.

Actually, that's the exact kind of language he used in his prayer just a couple verses ago about the will of God. **Read 9**

So he prays that believers *be filled* with the knowledge of God's will. Again, who fills them? God does, through the Holy Spirit.

But not only do we need to *know* how to live out God's will we need *the power* to live out God's will. And Paul's prayer makes it clear that both of those come from God himself. God supplies the power we need to live out his will.

Now, I want to talk about this power or a little bit because I think we often misunderstand what it means that we have God's power inside of us. We need to understand that a Christian is not just someone who believes that Jesus died and rose again and now we need to live a moral life or God will zap us. That's not Christianity. That's legalism and moralism.

Certainly to be a Christian someone has to believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus, but the Bible makes clear that someone who has true saving faith in Christ becomes the Temple of the Holy Spirit and is filled with the power of God.

If you remember right before Jesus ascended into heaven in **Acts 1:8** he told the disciples they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

**2 Tim. 1:7:** For God gave us a spirit [the Holy Spirit] not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

God the Holy Spirit resides in us, lives in us and empowers us for godly service and godly living. We don't become God, of course, but we become the dwelling place of God where he powers us to live obediently for his glory. And he does that by giving us strength, or power in a specific way. **Read 11a**

So Paul is praying that we would be strengthened *according* to the power God has, *according* to his own might.

I remember reading a history book on the Brooklyn Bridge and they were talking about the ultra rich people in New York at the time. And people would go to parties where the hosts would give out gold jewelry and diamonds and ornate things as party gifts. “Hey, welcome to my party, here are some diamonds.” You and I probably can’t even fathom those kinds of parties. But what they are doing is giving people gifts in accordance with their riches, in accordance to their ability. They have a lot of wealth and so they give lavish gifts. Actually, it’d be a little ridiculous if you went to a party at a billionaire’s house and they gave out gifts they got from the dollar store: “Oh, you shouldn’t have.” If a billionaire gave out cheap gifts they’d actually be seen as stingy, wouldn’t they?

In the same way, God doesn’t give out just a little bit of power for us to live righteous lives for his glory. No, he gives power in accordance with who he is. He strengthens believers according to his own glorious might. So, just how powerful is God? Well, we know he created the entire universe - billions and billions of galaxies - by his words. He is in absolute sovereign control of all things at all times. All the nations are like a drop in the bucket to him. He’s pretty powerful. And he’s not chintzy in giving us the power that we need to live out our lives. He gives us power in accordance with the power he has.

**Look** over at **2 Peter 1:3-4**. It’s actually pretty amazing how often the Bible talks about God giving us power to live out the Christian life. If you want an interesting study, you can just look up the word “power” in the NT and you’ll see that God’s power in us is almost just taken for granted. Here Peter makes it clear that God has given us this power. **Read 3-4**

You know what Peter is basically saying? We have all the power we need to live out lives of godliness. If you are truly a Christian you can’t actually say “Well, I just can’t obey that command” or “That ones just too hard for me.” No one can say “I just can’t obey the Lord.” No, if you are a Christian God has actually given you all the power you need. We have it for all things - that’s pretty comprehensive - that pertain to our life and for godliness. Other places say we have been given power as well.

Now, flip back to **Col. 1** because I want to stop here and just make an interesting point. Remember: Peter says we have this power. But Paul says he prays that they be strengthened by this power. So the question is: If Christians have this power, why does Paul pray that they be strengthened by it? Why would he ask God for something that God has already given?

Let me see if I can give you an analogy to help. I’m one of those people who walks into the room and turns all the lights on - I like light. If you drive by my house at night you’ll probably notice it looks remarkably similar to a lighthouse on the ocean warning ships of danger. I’m not sure how I would have survived prior to the 1900s without modern power sources. Now, of course, all of our houses are hooked up to a power source - Avista, Inland, an off-grid system, whatever. We have been given access to a massive power source. It’s there, all we need to do is access it.

Now imagine if I were talking to my neighbor outside one day and he said, “Boy, I notice you have a lot of power - look at all those lights. I don’t have any power; I have to wander around using candles and flashlights.” And I look up and see the power line going to his house. And I ask him, “Well you’re hooked up to power - why don’t you use your lights?” “You know I’ve tried to use that power but I’m not really sure how it works. I bumped into something once and a light came on but I don’t know how it happened.” And I say, “Have you noticed those little white sticks poking out of the wall when you enter a room?” “Yeah?” “You might play with those a little bit and see if that doesn’t turn some lights on and help you out a little bit.” We are hooked up to power, but sometimes we don’t access it.

Paul is not asking God to give the Colossians power - God’s already done that. Paul is asking that they be strengthened with the power God has already supplied. If you’re in Christ you have access to all the power of God. But sometimes we need to go find the proverbial light switches and turn them on.

How does God strengthen us? Now, not many of these are going to be new to us. But what might be new is how they are connected to strength and power.

1) Through reading the Bible.

**Psa. 119:28:** My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!

2) Through God’s people.

In the book of Job one of Job’s friends says about Job: “Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands (**Job 4:3**). We need to seek out other Christians who are going to encourage us and strengthen us.

In **Acts 14:22** Paul was “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

Encouragement doesn’t always mean people are telling you the brighter side of life and have naive optimism. Sometimes what they’re telling you is life is brutal but one day we’ll walk into the Kingdom of God and have joy forever. They remind us of the eternal goal.

3) Through prayer.

**Psa. 10:17:** O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear.

4) Through Service.

**Rom. 1:11-12:** For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.

5) Through being reminded of grace.

**2 Tim. 2:1:** You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Sometimes we lack power because we are very aware of our sin and shame and we go around feeling guilty and crushed and defeated because we blew it for the millionth time. You know what we need to be reminded of? Grace.

As much as we should strive with all we are to live lives of obedience, we are going to sin, we’re going to fail. And what strengthens us when we fail is to be reminded of God’s grace to us through Jesus.

So to finish the analogy: the proverbial light switches of God’s strength in our lives are doing things, frankly, we already know we should be doing. But we need to be reminded that it is through these that we get strengthened.

Now, Paul prays for the Colossians to be strengthen for two very specific reasons. Look at the last little bit of **Vs. 11. Read**

So they need God’s power for endurance. Sometimes when we need to be obedient in a specific situation what we need is endurance. We need the ability to go on and on and on.

**Look back at 1 Cor. 10:12-13** for a minute. This is a verse that we often quote to basically remind us that as believers there is never a situation we are in where we have to sin. God will never put us in a situation where the only option available to us is to violate the commands God has given us. It’ll never happen. In fact, there will always be a way of escape. **Read 12-13**

So Paul says we need to be on our guard. A lot of times we expose ourselves to temptation when we shouldn’t. We put ourselves in situations that we think we can handle and usually that’s arrogance. If you think you can stand, take heed - be cautious - lest you fall.

A sign of a mature Christian is that they know they are weak and need to be on guard for temptation. Immature Christians think they can withstand anything. “Oh going there won’t affect me,” “Hanging out with these people won’t affect me” “I can watch this or listen to

that - no problem,” “I can dabble a little with this sin.” And then they get clobbered. Take heed.

But Paul gives us some insight. There’s no temptation that is new. Sexual temptations are not new. Greed is not new, covetousness is not new. Gossip, slander, lying, drunkenness, pride, cheating - these are all as old as time. **Read 13**

No matter the temptation it’s been done before. But God will never put in our path a temptation that we can’t - through his power - overcome. God is faithful to give us what we need to overcome it. And usually we stop the verse when he says “and God will provide a way of escape.” But the verse doesn’t stop there. **Read 13**

The way of escape isn’t always that the temptation will go away or that somehow we can remove ourselves from the temptation. Sometimes we can’t. You know what the way of escape is often is? It’s the ability to endure the temptation with our falling into it.

You think of Jesus when he was tempted by Satan. He was tempted for 40 days and nights by Satan himself. God didn’t make Satan go away. Jesus didn’t pretend Satan wasn’t there. You know what he did? He endured the temptation when all of us would have failed.

God *will* provide a way of escape but often times what that looks like is endurance.

See, sometimes temptations don’t go away. Maybe your spouse tempts you to sin. Maybe your coworkers tempt you to sin. Maybe living in a nice neighborhood you’re tempted to covetousness and greed or if you live in a bad neighborhood your tempted to pride. Maybe in school you sit next to someone who is very attractive. You can’t just go “Well, I’m not going to school anymore.” No, God will give us the ability to endure those things.

Now, are there times and situations where we need to remove ourselves from the situation? Sure. We need to be wise about the situations we put ourselves in. But listen: the true power of God is shown in us when temptation comes our way and we’re not prideful about our ability, but we patiently endure it.

By the way, endurance is a sign of Christian maturity. The ability to go further and further without sin. Imagine someone who goes to the gym 3 times a week and does the treadmill. The expectation is that over time they will gain endurance. If someone goes to the gym 3 times a week for 2 years and after 2 years they can’t really go much farther than when they first began we know that there is a problem, don’t we? Endurance should be continually increasing as we mature.

That’s what Paul is talking about back in **Col 1**. The power of God gives us the ability to endure in the Christian life. One of the things we need to be in prayer for other believers is

that God would give them power to endure the trials and temptations that come their way. Sometimes the things God has given us to endure are difficult and we need to be in prayer for endurance.

Another reason we need God's power is to have joyful patience. **Read 11**

I think it's safe to say that most of us are impatient on some level. We are addicted to instant gratification. We want to be healed now, mature now, be financially well off now. We want dinner now, want Christmas now, summer now, peace and quiet now.

God doesn't place a lot of importance on immediately giving us what we want. God values patience. And not just patience, but patience with joy.

I'll be honest: patience with joy is hard for me. I'm pretty patient, but I'm not always joyful as I wait. I'm not Eeyore: "Why does this always happen to me." But I'm not usually brimming with gladness when I have to wait either. But that's what Paul is praying for.

You remember when Paul and Silas were in the prison in Philippi in **Acts 16:19-34**? They had been beaten Paul and Silas for casting out a demon and thrown them in prison. And they weren't down there sulking and pouting and talking about how unfair they had been treated. You remember what they were doing? They were praying and singing hymns to God. They were patiently enduring being wronged. But they were doing it with joy.

I have to tell you, the witness of Christ in our lives is not just that we endure stuff. Lots of people endure difficult situations And it's not just that we're patient through it. It's that we endure and are joyfully patient. Can I tell you something? When I see that in a person - suffering while being joyfully patient - I know it's a work of God in their lives. Nothing else can explain it.

This is something we need to be in prayer for on behalf of others.

So we pray that God would strengthen his people; that they would tap into the strength he supplies.

Second, we pray that others would be thankful. **Read 12-14**

These 2 little verses are really amazing all on their own. We will hardly do justice to what Paul says here. The theme of course is thankfulness. God's people should be marked by thankfulness. We should be marked by a continual remembrance for what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. And if we're not sure exactly what to be thankful for, Paul lists 4 things to be thankful for.

1) The Father has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. **Read 12**

Throughout the OT there is this continual theme of inheritance. God first promised and inheritance to Abraham: land, blessing, people, a messiah. Then God promises that inheritance to Abraham's son Isaac. Then to Isaac's son Jacob. Then to all Jacob's children, the people of Israel. God continually refers to his grace and blessing as an inheritance - something a father gives to his children.

And Paul says: all of that blessing that God promised to the Jews in the OT is available for everyone who has faith in Christ in the NT. And the inheritance isn't something we deserved or earned. It's something that the Father qualified us for. He made it possible for us to receive blessing when we didn't deserve it.

2) The Father has delivered us from the domain of darkness. **Read 13** What is that? It's the worldly, God-hating system that indulges in the world the flesh and the devil.

You take a look around the world and the world isn't neutral toward God. Occasionally it pretends to be neutral or even accomodating. But in reality the world hates God because it loves its own sin. It is defined by darkness.

When God reached out and saved us, he did so by delivering us out of that domain of blackness and sin. He opened our eyes to just how black and dark it is. Do you know people who are headlong in darkness and they just don't even recognize it? It's like plunging into sin is just normal for them? That's the domain of darkness, and it's what God has delivered us out of. Occasionally we still dabble in that world - and we shouldn't. We need to be reminded that God has taken us out of there.

3) The Father hasn't just delivered us out of darkness but he has transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. **Read 13**

This is amazing. It's not just that God has rescued us from a terrible place - a dark domain - and then just left us to figure things out on our own. He didn't leave us in some sort of neutral gray area. No, brought us into a Kingdom.

It would be like someone who lived under the oppression of the North Korean regime for decades and decades being brought to the United States and given a billion dollars and a mansion surrounded by people who genuinely loved them.

God has transferred us into his own Kingdom where his Son is King. I love that Paul says his beloved Son. The Kingdom that we are transferred into is a Kingdom that is founded on - and defined by - love. There are many Kingdoms that are founded on fear and hate and insanity. That's not God's Kingdom. His Kingdom is founded on love for his own Son.

4) We can also thank God because we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. **Read 14**

At the end of the day this is the bottom line for why we thank God and praise God. That he has redeemed us. Through Jesus Christ, he has paid the penalty we deserve for our sins. That's what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is when someone else pays what we owe.

If we crash into someone else's car and they say, "Don't worry, I forgive you - you're good." Who pays for the damage? They do. The damage doesn't just magically go away. Someone has to pay for it.

With our sins, Paul wants us to continually be thankful the Father has redeemed us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. He has paid what we owe. And though faith in Christ our sins are forgiven.

Not some of them, not most of them. Not all of them but we've got to pitch in a little to smooth things over. No, we thank God because through our Savior Jesus he has paid for every last one. To him be praise and thanks and glory. **Pray**