

A PRAYER FOR STEADFASTNESS
COLOSSIANS 1:9-12

Patrick Lawler had a persistent toothache. For about a week his tooth had been bothering him. It was bad enough that even his eyesight became blurry. He tried painkillers. They didn't work. He tried icepacks to reduce the swelling. Nope. He even tried the cure-all for all mouth-related pains — ice cream. Even that didn't work. Fortunately, his wife worked for a dentist, so after six days of pain, he went to the dentist who took an x-ray and discovered the source of his pain. It was a four-inch nail in his head.

Lawler is a construction worker; six days earlier his nail gun had misfired and he didn't realize that it had sent the nail backwards, through his open mouth and into his skull, narrowly missing his right eye. He was referred to a surgeon who successfully removed the nail and Lawler's tooth pain and blurry vision went away. A right diagnosis led to physical relief and restoration of function.

We talk regularly about the brokenness of the world and the difficulty of living in this world. When you are tempted, where do you turn for help? When you are provoked to anger by so many injustices (personal and cultural), what do you do? When you are weary spiritually or physically how do you reinvigorate yourself? When you know you should persevere but the task feels mountainous, what do you do? There are many options for help: we might ask a friend, write a blog or post on Face Book, or take a nap, or eat a bowl of ice cream. But even for believers the calling to endurance and steadfastness ("don't move") can appear overwhelming and impossible. God has given the body of Christ to walk with us, Scripture to correct and guide us, the Spirit of God to embolden us, and counselors and mentors to exhort and encourage us. But too often we overlook one ready resource for us: prayer.

One writer has noted, "As time passes, our temptation is to rely on our past experiences, on the knowledge we've gained, on new methods and ideas — on everything except [God]..." We trade His infinite sufficiency for our infinite inadequacy — it's no wonder that we end up troubled and despairing. We need Him, we have access to Him, and too often we neglect the privilege of going to Him for help.

As we continue to think about how to be steadfast in life and ministry, this morning we look at Paul's prayer in Colossians 1 where we will hear not only an admonition to pray but an example of how to pray —

CULTIVATE STEADFASTNESS BY PRAYING CONSISTENTLY.

Temptations to embrace falsehood and defect from Christ abound. It is not enough to say "be steadfast," "don't do that..." We must be strengthened in the fight for steadfastness and that strength comes from God and is accessed in prayer. We pray to prepare our hearts for our pressures and temptations. In his own praying and in his reminder to the Colossians about praying, Paul points to **six petitions** to make in our prayers:

1. Be Steadfast by Praying for Spiritual **FILLING** (v. 9)
2. Be Steadfast by Praying for Worthy **LIVES** (v. 10a)
3. Be Steadfast by Praying for Spiritual **FRUITFULNESS** (v. 10b)
4. Be Steadfast by Praying to Know **GOD** (v. 10c)
5. Be Steadfast by Praying for Strength to **ENDURE** (v. 11)
6. Be Steadfast by Praying for Hearts of **GRATITUDE** (v. 12)

- **Background:** it's helpful to be aware of the context of Paul's prayer for Colossae —
 - ✓ Colossae was in Asia Minor on the main road between Ephesus and the Euphrates River. It was in a triangle of cities with Laodicea and Hierapolis, but those cities were becoming more prominent because of trade and industry that was moving there from Colossae. [Economic troubles?]
 - ✓ Because Colossae was on a major roadway, it was influenced by many different people groups that came through the city, and all the false philosophies and religions of those people.
 - ✓ Some of the people who settled in Colossae were the Phrygians who had a tendency toward unrestrained pagan worship and mysticism (cf. 2:18).
 - ✓ False teaching and heresy grew up in the church, though the exact problem is never named:
 - Legalism (tied to Jewish roots, 2:16-17) that led to extreme (secular) asceticism (2:20-23)
 - Special knowledge & mysticism (2:18) that is rooted in worldly tradition (astrology? 2:4, 8, 20)
 - Because of the gnostic idea of the separation of soul and body (one can commit sinful acts in the body and be spiritual), there was an element of licentiousness (3:5, 8ff).
 - The heresy had a Jewish element (misuse of the OT), an ascetic element, a libertine element, and a speculative and secular element. It was a bizarre blending of religions that was leading the church away from Christ.
 - ✓ These pressures and temptations in Colossae are not dissimilar from our own world — economic and political uncertainty and a melting pot of diverse ideas and philosophies drawing our attention.
- Because of these influences in the church, Paul prays for the Colossian church (vv. 3a, 3b, 9a; 4:12).
 - ✓ Because prayer is essential, he also admonishes them to pray and asks them to pray for him (4:3).
 - ✓ Prayer is not secondary to the task of being steadfast; it is the power for the task. Underneath any successful and steadfast church ministry is the practice of prayer (dependence).
 - ✓ In prayer we acknowledge our inability and our dependence on God's power. We need His strength. And His strength begins with and comes through the gospel. Paul reminds them of their position — faith in Christ gave them love for Christ's church (and steadfastness to church ministry, v. 4). The gospel gave them confidence in eternity (v. 5). And that eternal confidence from the gospel gave them endurance to bear spiritual fruit in the perverse world in which they lived (v. 6).
 - ✓ God's provision for the pressures of life for the Colossian church is the provision for Grace Bible Church (and its members) as well. Pray. Ask God. Go to the heavenly throne.
- What shall we pray?...

1. Be Steadfast by Praying for Spiritual FILLING (v. 9)

- In this verse and section Paul uses two terms for prayer:
 - ✓ The word **pray** is the most general word for prayer in the NT. It is an expression of dependence on God, but what is most significant is that the prayer is regular and ongoing, which he stresses by the present tense of the verb as well as affirming, **we have not ceased**. Paul continued in prayer (even though he'd never met them) and did not stop even when he might not have heard from them.
 - ✓ The word **ask** is a more specific term than “pray” — it focuses on the particular requests and emphasizes going to a superior person and eliciting help; it is a humble term of submission.
 - ✓ Notice that Paul’s prayer is also motivated by what he had heard about the Colossian church — **For this reason also, since the day we heard of it...** That is, the reason that he is praying is that he had heard of their faith (v. 4). He was motivated to pray for them because of their faith — that is, he wanted them to continue in their faith (there was no urgent, emergency need for prayer — he simply wants them to stay true to the faith, which is a good motive for our own prayers).
 - ✓ While not stated, because of the repeated warnings and correctives in the letter, it appears Paul is also concerned about them wandering from the faith. And that’s why he is relentless in praying. Prayer is the empowerment of our faithfulness. (Thank you for praying for me/elders/teachers...)
- The first request of Paul might also be the broadest and all-encompassing request — **be filled with the knowledge of His will**.
 - ✓ The word **fill** is used commonly by Paul and in this letter; perhaps his use of the term (“complete”) in 2:10 helpful here: Just as Christ is fully God, even while He was in the form of a man, Christ also has made us made us complete (**full**) in Him through the cross.
 - ✓ From God’s perspective, there is nothing lacking in us, so, here the desire of Paul is that these believers would come to experience the same kind of fullness in their spiritual living — that they would experience the fullness of what they are.
 - ✓ To be “full” also means to be “under the control of...” (“the wind filling a boat’s sails...”).
 - ✓ Specifically, Paul wants them to be under the control and domination of **God’s will** — that they would **know** and be obedient to God’s revealed moral will. That knowledge is found in Christ and Christ’s Word: 2:3; also cf. 1:28; 2:8, 23; 3:10; 3:16; 4:5. To know God’s Word is to know God’s will.
 - ✓ This knowledge of God’s will produces **spiritual understanding and wisdom**. That is, wisdom (the art of living rightly and well) and understanding (the application of wisdom to particular circumstances of life).
 - ✓ Pray for knowledge from God that will help you to live well. One roommate in seminary tended to be oblivious and ignorant of simple tasks (e.g., he couldn’t find the dipstick on his car); our other roommate became exasperated and said one time, “How can you be *so* smart — and *so* STUPID at the same time???” We don’t want to be that guy spiritually. We want to know what to do.

- As we think about persevering and being steadfast this verse reminds us:
 - ✓ *Persevere in prayer for one another.* Pray for your own needs, but also (even more?) intercede for others and their needs. You serve others when you pray for them.
 - ✓ *Pray and help people know the reality of what they are in Christ.* Being steadfast begins with a renewed mind and it is only possible to have a renewed mind by the Spirit's power and Word. So pray for the Spirit to comprehend truth (1 Cor. 2:12; Ps. 119:18) and how to live truth.

2. Be Steadfast by Praying for Worthy LIVES (v. 10a)

- A second primary component of Paul's prayer is that the Colossians would **walk in a manner** worthy of the Lord. When he says "walk," he simply means "live life." The believer's life should be lived in a particular manner. Here Paul uses an all-encompassing term — **worthy of the Lord**. To be "worthy" of the Lord suggests that His life and ours are in opposing scales and they are balanced; they are equitable.
 - ✓ The believer doesn't merit his salvation, but his life does correspond to and is consistent w/ Christ.
 - ✓ He says something similar in **1:18b** — we are conformed to Christ to look and behave like Him.
 - ✓ Paul further explains what he means with a worthy life when he says the goal is **to please Him in all respects** — in every area of life, we want to be pleasing to Christ.
 - ✓ We want to please Christ more than we want to please anyone else (Gal. 1:10; **2 Cor. 5:9, 15**). That is our heavenly and eternal ambition; it is also our ambition on earth.
- It's okay to pray for the removal of problems and the provision of help (3 Jn. 2). But the Lord is far more interested in the transformation of our hearts and our sanctification.
 - ✓ Pray for and help one another find ways to please God more than man. Our attempts to please man are always subservient to our need to please God and be conformed to Christ. (When we live to be worthy of Him, we will also please others in the best way possible, e.g., husband serving his wife.)
 - ✓ "Lord, You have revealed what I need to know and given me wisdom; will You help me live in a way that reflects I live for Christ and that He is my joy? Would my actions reflect His nature?"

3. Be Steadfast by Praying for Spiritual FRUITFULNESS (v. 10b)

- Following his prayer for worthy lives, Paul uses four participles to indicate the kinds of living that are worthy of Christ. Those four terms are the final four items for which we pray and work.
- One aspect of living worthy of Christ is **bearing fruit in every good work**.
 - ✓ Here fruit-bearing is a present tense, so it is a constant activity, something we are always pursuing.
 - ✓ What does he mean by bearing fruit? He tells us — bearing fruit includes those things we do when we do good works. He doesn't mean that we merit salvation by our good works, but that we demonstrate our salvation *in* our good works. Life in Christ produces living for Christ. We live out the reality of what we are in Christ, which was the testimony of the Colossians (**v. 6**).

- When suffering, we can still bear spiritual fruit — and that should be our prayer: Make us like...
 - ✓ Noah who faithfully built the ark for 120 years while being mocked (Gen. 6:7, 22)
 - ✓ Isaiah who preached and prophesied when he was promised no conversions (Is. 6:9ff)
 - ✓ Peter, who spoke the gospel in court and jail (Acts 4:8-12; cf. Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 16:15)
 - ✓ Paul, who praised God in the jail cell after being beaten (Acts 16:25; cf. Heb. 13:15)
 - ✓ The Philippians who joyously demanded to give a gift while impoverished (2 Cor. 8-9)
 - ✓ Epaphroditus who prayed and served while ill, to the point of death (Phil. 2:25ff)
 - ✓ Onesimus who repented and went back to Philemon to make restitution
 - ✓ Like every believer, who pursues fruitfulness in *whatever* we do (Col. 3:17)
- When we have difficulties we think it inhibits our fruitfulness. But every difficult comes through the hand of God and He gives/allows them not to inhibit fruitfulness and steadfastness, but to enhance it. Our troubles may be a gift to us to make us aware of our dependence on Him. Pray for fruitfulness.

4. Be Steadfast by Praying to Know GOD (v. 10c)

- The worthy life is one also that is *increasing in the knowledge of God*.
 - ✓ Paul's is saying that the way fruit-bearing and sanctification happen is *through* (by means of) knowing God. The more we know God, the more we will grow in sanctification and the more we will be worthy of Christ's name.
 - ✓ This is what Solomon said in Prov. 1:7; 9:10 and Paul affirmed in Phil. 3:10-11.
 - ✓ There is a direct connection between our knowledge of God and our growth in Christlikeness.
- What is amazing about this statement is that unredeemed man cannot know God (Jn. 14:17) and even believers cannot know God fully. Yet God has revealed Himself so that something of Him can be known by the believer so we can have eternal joy and confidence in that knowledge (1 Jn. 2:3, 13-14; 5:20).
 - ✓ "There is no knowledge attainable by man so vital as the knowledge of his God. To know Him with whom we have to do is the most important thing in human life." [George Morrison]
 - ✓ This knowledge of God is essential because "an unknown God can neither be trusted, served, nor worshipped." [A.W. Pink] Everything in our lives is dependent on the true knowledge of God.

"We are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who runs it. The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place, and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do not know about God. Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul." [Packer]

- The temptation in trouble (and great blessing) is to run from God. Pray not only to stay with Him, but to know Him, even if it means the fellowship of His suffering (Phil. 3:8-10; Ex. 33:13; Jn. 17:3; Ps. 25:4).

5. Be Steadfast by Praying for Strength to ENDURE (v. 11)

- Living worthy of Christ also includes being *strengthened with all power...*
 - ✓ With the knowledge of God also comes the power of God. God strengthens us to do everything He calls us to do; He enables every responsibility and command. Cf. Eph. 1:19.
 - ✓ God doesn't just give "some" power, but He gives us strength *according to His glorious might*. That is, He doesn't give *from* His strength, but He gives *in proportion to* His strength. Which means that as the limitless God of the universe, we have an infinite measure of power at our disposal.
 - ✓ The goal of this power is that it is *for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience*:
 - It is for every kind of *steadfastness* (1 C. 15:58) — for persevering through and bearing up under the load of every kind of *problem* (2 Cor. 6:4; Rom. 5:3) — what we commonly call "endurance."
 - It is for every kind of *patience* — for "suffering long" with every kind of *person* (2 Tim. 2:24).
- There has been much talk recently about apostasy (deconverting and deconstructing) —
 - ✓ It is tempting to give up and quit on Christ (read Hebrews. esp. ch. 11). Cultural pressures are weighty. While we may not face prison or physical persecution in the next 5-10 years, there are other kinds of suffering that will make us outcasts, mocked, spat upon, criticized, and more.
 - ✓ In America, where we love our freedom and we love to be loved, I wonder what the impact of that will be on the church. The temptation for many will be to say:
 - "It's too hard to battle against temptation; I give up." (e.g., Demas)
 - "It's too hard to be the only person remaining; I give up." (e.g., Elijah)
 - "It's too hard to be the outcast and discriminated against; I give up." (e.g., Hebrews)
 - "It's too hard to suffer physically the way I have; God doesn't care about me so I don't care about Him, either. I give up." (Job's wife and friends)
 - ✓ The power of God has been given to us to endure in all these situations.
- Pray for strength to endure. When God doesn't remove the affliction, He will give the strength for steadfastness. (Sometimes the way out is to endure and remain, 1 Cor. 10:13).

6. Be Steadfast by Praying for Hearts of GRATITUDE (v. 12)

- Finally, living worthy of Christ also means *joyously giving thanks to the Father...* This is how Paul began the chapter — with a recitation of reasons for gratitude (vv. 3-8).
 - ✓ In v. 3, he says the object of thanks is *to God*; here Paul says it is *to the Father*. They are one in the same; God and the Father refer to the same deity. But Paul is reminding us that the God who is in Heaven is not distant and aloof, but intimately acquainted with and connected to us. He treats us for what we are — His beloved children. He can *only* love us, if we are His. Whatever your struggle, if you are a Christian, don't lose sight of the truth that He is your Father.

- ✓ While Paul has exemplified thankfulness, he also prays that the Colossians will be thankful, which is a reminder that gratitude is a supernatural, not natural response to God. There is a sense that gratitude to God is also a gift from God. And if we will be thankful it will be because we are faithful to pursue and work at appropriating the gift of gratitude He gives us.
- ✓ The focus of the gratitude in this verse is directed to the Person who has qualified us to share in the inheritance... The focus of gratitude is on the gift of grace that redeems us from sin and gives us everything we need both now and for eternity. He has given us an eternal inheritance (e.g., Phil. 3:20; Acts 26:18; Gal. 3:29).
- When you pray, be thankful in every circumstance (1 Th. 5:16ff). There are always reasons for gratitude.

CONCLUSION: If we say we will pray, then we must pray now. It is not only fitting to pray, but we are compelled by this passage to pray. And as we pray, we also affirm that we are not only asking God to do this in us, but that we are also willing, under the power of the Spirit and Word to also pursue these things:

Our Father, we bow before you in humility and dependence. We need you to save us; we need you to transform us and guide us if we will be of any service to you. We affirm our agreement with Paul and You about the priorities of what we should pray and do from this passage. As we think about the calling of Christ, the provision of salvation, and the pressures of our lives, we ask for these things:

Would You make us persistent in prayer? In prayer we acknowledge our inability and our dependence on You. So our sometime prayerlessness is an act of unbelief. Would you forgive us of our lack of faith and would you compel us to pray and give us a delight in prayer? Might our hearts be inclined every day, throughout the day, to talk to you about the joys and needs of the day? And might we especially be consumed with a desire, like Paul, to pray for the needs of others as much as and more than our own?

Will You fill us with Your wisdom and Your Spirit? Will you use your Spirit in our lives to give us a knowledge of Your will? We want to know what is required of us and available to us, so will you use the Spirit to guide us as we read and study Your Word so that we can know it and obey it. In our personal difficulties and in the troubles of our day would you give us courage to implement what we learn from the Spirit's Word? Might we not be fools who hear the Word but walk away from the revelation of Christ and ourselves and don't obey.

Will You compel us to live lives that are worthy of You and our Savior, Jesus? We want to be transformed so that our lives conform to our Savior's life. We desire to live in concert with Christ. We want to look like Christ. Would you sanctify us increasingly so that we live Christ-honorable lives? As we ask for worthy lives, we also affirm our commitment, by the Spirit, to live worthy of You — and might our pursuit of pleasing Him overflow into actions that benefit and are a blessing to others?

Will You produce spiritual fruit in us? Would you give us fruit as evangelists, disciplers, worshippers, and as discipliners? Would you help us to deal with sin in our own lives and then grace to love and help those who are weak with sin in their lives so they can be freed from Satan's deception? And would you make us fruitful in our suffering — like Noah and Isaiah and Peter and Paul and the Philippians and millions of other faithful people might our hardships not keep us from fruitful living for you.

Will You give us a deepening knowledge of You? We want to know about You and we want to know You. We want to be consumed with You, feasting on You, satisfied with You, guardians of the truth and protected from falsehood and error. We know that blessings can tempt us to forget You and hardships can entice us to run from You; in all things (both good and bad) would you make us steadfast to pursue and know You?

Will You give us strength to endure? The world is enticing us to leave You for many reasons. Would you embolden us and strengthen us and keep us? Would you keep us from failing and making a mockery of our lives and leading others go mock Christ? As we ask for strength, we also affirm our commitment, by the Spirit, to live worthy of You by appropriating the strength You have given us.

Will You give us hearts of gratitude? We are tempted to be discontent with what we don't have on earth; make us content with the riches of what we have in Heaven. Help us to see the grace and goodness of Christ and help us be thankful for all things in all circumstances. As we ask for gratitude, we also affirm our commitment, by the Spirit, to cultivate thankfulness and flee from ingratitude and self-absorption.

We pray these things because we are infinitely inadequate and You are infinitely sufficient. We need You. So we come and ask and trust that You will give us what we need to be steadfast and remain with You in all things.

BENEDICTION (Rob): Ephesians 3:14-21