

# A MODEL PRAYER LIST

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

*Maybe we don't see many miraculous answers to prayer  
because we do not pray for the right things.*

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# A Model Prayer List

Colossians 1:9-14

One of the subjects that seem to confuse us the most is prayer. In other words, how do we pray, what do we pray about, what position do we assume when we pray, and why are many of our prayers not answered?

Jesus said this about prayer:

*"<sup>7</sup>But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted" (John 15:7 / NLT)!*

In His Sermon On The Mount, Jesus said:

*"<sup>7</sup>Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks" (Matthew 7:7-8 / NLT).*

Sounds pretty simple, and yet how many of us have prayed for things and not received what we prayed for? I know that I have prayed for some things for years, and yet I have not received what I have prayed for.

There are many reasons for unanswered prayer. However, I'd like us to focus on just one this morning. Listen to what James says:

*"<sup>2</sup>You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it. <sup>3</sup>And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure" (James 4:2-3 / NLT).*

One of the reasons we don't get what we pray for is that we pray for wrong things or we pray with wrong motives. Even our prayers for others are often tainted with self-interest.

Let me give you an example of wrong-headed prayer. Little Johnny had been misbehaving and was sent to his room. After a while he emerged and informed his mother that he had thought it over and then prayed about it.

"Fine," said his pleased mother, "If you ask God to help you not misbehave, He will help you."

"Oh, I didn't ask Him to help me not misbehave," said little Johnny, "I asked Him to give you more patience and grace in dealing with me."

The early church experienced many miracles because they prayed fervently for God to use them for His glory. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **MAYBE WE DON'T SEE MANY MIRACULOUS ANSWERS TO PRAYER BECAUSE WE DO NOT PRAY FOR THE RIGHT THINGS.** As we study through this morning's text, it will present us an opportunity for us to examine what we pray for.

## I. PRAYER FOR HOLINESS (VS 9-10)

***Since God Is Holy We Should Pray For One Another And For Ourselves That God Make Us Holy.***

In verses 9-10, we are instructed to pray for holiness. This really is pretty simple isn't it? **SINCE GOD IS HOLY WE SHOULD PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER AND FOR OURSELVES THAT GOD**

**MAKE US HOLY.** Constantly the Bible commands us to be holy because the God we worship is holy. In this section, we can see what the pursuit of holiness consists of.

### **A. ADVANCE THE GOSPEL (9a)**

In the first half of verse 9 we find that the advance of the Gospel is what puts people on the road to holiness. The first phrase reads, "For this reason, since the day we heard about you." This refers to what Paul said previously. Epaphras brought the Gospel to the city of Colosse and when he explained it, many of the people in the city received Christ and salvation. There is only one way to get on the road to holiness, and that is by submitting to the Lord Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord. In our day, we see people trying to find holiness, salvation, and satisfaction in life by chasing after all sorts of false religions and philosophies. It is eerie to see how closely our society parallels the society of Paul's day. People in the United States are chasing after all sorts of mystical philosophies and religions from the east. In fact we see many movie stars adopting all sorts of cultic and mysterious religions. We see people of Islam blowing themselves up in hopes of being holy and accepted by God. People have adopted the good works approach to holiness. In other words, if I do more good than bad, try to do good, and don't harm anyone, then I'll be holy and acceptable to God. People try to become holy by being self-righteous, gaining knowledge, and trying to hook up with supernatural forces. The only two religions that are publicly attacked these days are Judaism and Christianity.

The Apostle Paul is reminding the Colossians that there is only one way to holiness, and that is the way God designed and revealed to us in the Bible and in the Person of Jesus Christ. In his letter to the Romans Paul put it this way;

*"<sup>9</sup>For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved" (Romans 10:9-10 / NLT).*

I know that we have watered down the force of this passage because for the most part, confessing Jesus as Lord doesn't cost us much. But in the days of Paul, confessing Jesus as the risen Lord could get you killed and make you an outcast from you family and friends. To understand this a little better, it would be like a Muslim living in a Muslim country to get up one day and confess that he had found Jesus and converted to Christianity. He would be shunned by his family and friends, probably jailed and executed. So this public confession is truly an action that was based on a belief.

For us moderns, we should keep telling ourselves that if Jesus is not the Lord of our lives, then He is not our Savior either. We get on the road of holiness by confessing our total unworthiness and our total dependence on the work of Jesus on our behalf.

### **B. GODLY THINKING (9b)**

Growth in Godly thinking is the next step in our pursuit of holiness as described in the second half of verse 9. Before I go on to describe this more, let me just demonstrate this nice little concept of growing in holiness. In these 6 verses Paul prays that the Colossians grow in knowledge, holiness, power, and thankfulness. Growth in each area is meant to affect growth in the other areas. For example, if I grow in knowledge about God, then I should grow in my behavior. As my behavior becomes more Godly, I should gain more power. The more I grow in each area, causes my thankfulness to grow. The neat thing is that as I grow in any area, it ought to affect other areas. Once on this road to holiness, it should be a spiral upwards. The next thing Paul prays for the Colossians is that God fill them with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

In Paul's day, an Eastern mystical religion called Gnosticism was starting to spread. It was an elaborate system that was based on secret knowledge. Let me just give you some of the major doctrines that Paul would have to refute. First of all, they believed that spirit was good and flesh was evil. In fact, they explained the created world like this. God being all spirit was good. Some rogue angels rebelled. And through a complicated series of angels coming down, created the physical world. The idea of salvation for people is to gain special knowledge that will help them to emphasize the spiritual side of their being and someday be reunited with the ultimate spirit. Paul will argue that Jesus is God and through Him all things were created. Creation was good and we are a unity of body and spirit.

Since the Gnostics believed that the flesh was evil, two schools of thought developed. The first school felt that since the body was evil and ultimately unimportant, they could do anything they wanted. They could indulge all the sensual immorality they wanted without consequence. The second school took the opposite route. Since the body was evil, they denied the desires of the body. In fact, they punished the body by beating it, mistreating it, and causing it to suffer. You can see how this second school of thought influenced Christianity and how they could take Paul's very words out of context when he used to say that he disciplines his body. Many forms of ascetic Christian practices probably find their roots in this Gnostic religion.

And as we said before, salvation for the Gnostic came through obtaining secret knowledge. In other words, people had to join these sects and gurus would lead them to the mysterious knowledge. I have oversimplified the description of Gnosticism because I just wanted to hit the highlights. But it is an interesting study.

When you take time to look at the world in which we live, you can easily pick up these characteristics of false religions. Paul will argue against all of these. First of all he argues against secret knowledge. First of all the gospel of Jesus Christ is simple to understand, it is public knowledge, and open for everyone. There is no need to seek out secret knowledge or special gurus. As we read and study the Bible, God Himself will fill us up with the knowledge of His will for us. The word for "fill" in this section is passive. The concept of God filling us is that we are being filled by God. I don't want you to get the wrong idea. It is not as if God is standing over us with a container of knowledge and pouring it in us. No, when we submitted to Jesus as Lord and Savior, God the Holy Spirit took up residence in our lives. Paul will talk about this later in his letter. The picture is this. The fullness of God lives in us through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Now since we are so sinful, picture our bodies and minds as filled with garbage and clutter. As we clear out a space in us through Bible reading, study, and submission, the Holy Spirit will fill that area. Our goal is to constantly clear out space for the Holy Spirit to fill in us.

Let's say that I have a problem with gossip. The pastor is preaching about the harm gossip can cause. I humble myself and allow God the Holy Spirit speak to me and fill me with the knowledge of how gossip displeases God. The more I open myself, the more The Holy Spirit fills me. God's will is that I stop gossiping.

The method God uses is through spiritual wisdom and understanding. The word for knowledge was *epignosis*. I'm sure you can see the word *gnosis* there. So Paul is really saying that all knowledge comes from God the Father through His written word the Bible, through His incarnate Son Jesus, and through the mediation of The Holy Spirit. There is no secret knowledge.

The word for wisdom is *sophia* and the word for understanding is *sunesis*. The interesting thing about these two words is that they are not solely mental activities. Wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures has everything to do with practical knowledge and activity. The equivalent words in Hebrew are *hokma* and *maskil*. Wisdom for the Hebrew was to take God's laws and apply them to everyday situations. For example, the law may be that we are not to gossip. Wisdom and understanding would say something like, "When a friend comes to you with tales of another's faults, don't listen and run away."

I think one of the downfalls of modern day evangelical Christianity is that we have become modern day Gnostics. We think that just because we believe the right stuff and talk the right stuff that we are fine. But the Bible says that we come to know God's will for our lives through

taking these truths and applying them to everyday life. James made it clear that faith without works is dead.

### C. GODLY LIVING (10)

And that brings us to Godly living as it is described in verse 10. Holiness starts with knowledge and ends in humble, submissive, obedient responses. In the first half of verse 10 Paul prays that the Colossians live a life worth of the Lord Jesus. I have read Colossians a lot of times but I never stopped to ponder this phrase until this week. Paul talks about an absolute value here. What is the worth of the Lord Jesus Christ? Let's think about it. Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Jesus was God from the beginning. And yet because of our sin and for our salvation, Jesus left heaven, set aside His heavenly privileges, took on human flesh, and came to live among us. He allowed Himself to be mocked, humiliated, tortured, and executed in the most horrible way so that through His blood we could be made right with God. He did all that so we would not have to spend an eternity in hell. He did that even though we did not deserve it. He did that even though we continue to take all that for granted.

First of all, what is that worth? And secondly, what would it look like for us to live lives worthy of our Lord Jesus? I don't know that I have ever prayed that prayer in those words. I know that I am learning things these days at a rate that is hard to keep up with. I know in my accountability group we have been learning about being holy in different areas of our lives and as I start to work on one, we learn about another. And this week, I'm challenged to live a life worthy of the suffering, death, and personal love of my Lord Jesus. I know there will have to be a period of time where I stop gaining more knowledge and take some time to convert it to wisdom. I can remember spending some time with Dallas Willard. I think he really understood this concept. We bowed our heads to pray. There was a moment of silence, and Dallas simply and reverently said, "Your Majesty." I can't even begin to describe the feeling that came over me. But I know what Paul meant when he prayed that we live lives worthy of the Lord Jesus.

You see, authentic Christianity is described in the second half of verse 10 as living to please God. I want all of us to pay very careful attention to the words Paul uses here in this phrase. We please God by bearing fruit in every good work. Here is what is important and here is what separates legalists and Pharisees from authentic Christians. Yes we are to do good works, but anyone can do good works. The thing that separates authentic Christians from everyone else is that we are to bear fruit. Listen to Jesus:

*<sup>5</sup>"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. <sup>7</sup>But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! <sup>8</sup>My true disciples produce much fruit. This brings great glory to my Father" (John 15:5-8 / NLT).*

Jesus makes it clear that many people will do many great works in His Name. But what He is really concerned with is the fruit that is manifest in the works. The Apostle Paul described it like this:

*<sup>22</sup>But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law" (Galatians 5:22-23 / NLT).*

So we please God when we obey Him, humbly serve Him and others with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And look at the last phrase in verse 10. Here is that spiral upwards I was talking about. The more we submit to and obey God, the more we grown in our knowledge of Him. And that starts the growth cycle all over again, only this time at a higher level.

As I examine my own prayer life, I know I pray for these things, but it seems as if these kinds of prayers for holiness should be the primary focus of our prayers. If we pray for God to grow us in holiness, he will. It seems to follow that **SINCE GOD IS HOLY WE SHOULD PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER AND FOR OURSELVES THAT GOD MAKE US HOLY.**

## **II. PRAYER FOR STRENGTH (VS 11-14)**

### ***Since Pursuing Holiness Is A Lifelong Task, We Should Pray That God Strengthen Us To Successfully Complete Our Journey.***

If we start to pray that God make us holy, then the next subject of prayer is a logical follow up. Paul prays for strength in verses 11-14. **SINCE PURSUING HOLINESS IS A LIFELONG TASK, WE SHOULD PRAY THAT GOD STRENGTHEN US TO SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE OUR JOURNEY.**

#### **A. POWER (11a)**

In the first half of verse 11, Paul prays that the Colossians be strengthened with all power. The words *strengthen* and *power* are the same root word. In Greek the root word is *dunamis*. It is the same word we get dynamite from. Here is the force of this sentence in English. Paul says that he wants them to be powered up with all power. And this is not just some human power. He is talking about the power that raised Jesus from the dead. I think we all pray that God give us power to succeed at things we want to accomplish. We pray to get a promotion at work, to ace a test, or to overcome some difficult situation. But look at what we are to pray for power to accomplish. We are to pray for great endurance and patience. We often pray that God relieve our suffering or to give us what we want. But here Paul prays that God give the Colossians power to develop patience and endurance. In a culture where we are raised to seek pleasure and achieve our own personal goals, it is hard for us to make sense out of passages like this one in James:

*<sup>2</sup>Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. <sup>3</sup>For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. <sup>4</sup>So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything" (James 1:2-4 / NLT).*

I know that we have come to equate pleasure as good and pain as evil. However, the Bible tells us to pray for God's will whether it is painful or pleasurable. True power comes in submitting to God's will. While undergoing some incredible persecution, the early church did not pray for power to conquer Rome or their persecutors. Listen to how they prayed and the result:

*<sup>29</sup>Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. <sup>30</sup>Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."*

*<sup>31</sup>After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:29-31 / NIV).*

They did not pray for God to relieve their suffering. They prayed that God would embolden them to do His will. And when they finished praying, the building shook and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. I think that I can see a change in my prayer life over the past few years. These days I have been praying for God to make me the man He wants me to be and that I find and complete all the good works that He has prepared in advance for me to do. I don't feel as if I have suffered much in life at all.

## **B. JOY AND THANKFULNESS (11b-12)**

We have talked about this before but the last half of verse 11 and all of verse 12 reminds us that we should be living lives of joy and thankfulness. In this section and the next, there will be a lot of language that is meant to compare the church with Israel. Just as God delivered the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land, we are delivered by God from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. We now share in the eternal inheritance of Israel. I'm not sure that we spend much time giving thanks to God for our salvation. I know sometimes I come to think that I was saved in the past. I did that and I checked that off. If we do not live joyful and thankful lives, it's because we have forgotten that we were eternally hopelessly headed for hell and there was nothing we could do about it. It was from this horrible destiny that Jesus rescued us. Our eternal destiny is now heaven. If we truly understood that, there is nothing in this world that should ever take our joy away, and every day we live should be another opportunity to thank God. Here is how Warren Weirsbe sums it up: "Thankfulness is the opposite of selfishness. The selfish person says, 'I *deserve* what comes to me! Other people *ought* to make me happy!' But the mature Christian realizes that life is a gift from God, and that the blessings of life come only from His bountiful hand."

The fact that our names are written in heaven, in the book of life should be enough for us. As the hymnist said, "It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me."

## **C. STAYING FOCUSED (13-14)**

And as verses 13-14 demonstrate, this should help us keep focused. Again this is more language from the Exodus. God rescued us, redeemed us, forgave us, loves us, and continues to journey with us through this life. But again, I want to point out one phrase in verse 13, "and brought us into the kingdom of the Son." That word brought is *mesthistano* in Greek. It is a word of suddenness. Other translations use the word translated. The NLT uses transferred. In one moment, in that moment that we submitted to Jesus as Lord and Savior, we were suddenly transferred from death to life, from despair to hope, from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of God. In that moment, we were connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

When we pray for strength we are really praying that we can demonstrate joy and thankfulness as God develops patience and endurance as He uses all sorts of situations to develop us, make us, and mold us into the image of His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **SINCE PURSUING HOLINESS IS A LIFELONG TASK, WE SHOULD PRAY THAT GOD STRENGTHEN US TO SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE OUR JOURNEY.**

## **III. EPILOGUE**

I know that we pray for all sorts of things. But in today's text, Paul reminds us that if we pray to grow in our knowledge of God and His will, growth in holy living, growth in power to endure the difficult journey, and growth in our joy and thankfulness, God will certainly answer those prayers. **MAYBE WE DON'T SEE MANY MIRACULOUS ANSWERS TO PRAYER BECAUSE WE DO NOT PRAY FOR THE RIGHT THINGS.**

I don't know about you, but over the years I have prayed for all sorts of things but I really want to pray more for God to have His will and His way in my life. Listen to how E. Stanley Jones sums up this attitude:

*"Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God. Aligned to God's redemptive will, anything, everything can happen in character, conduct, and creativeness. The whole person is heightened by that prayer contact. In that contact I find health for my body, illumination for my mind, and moral and spiritual reinforcement for my soul."*