

Main Idea: As we examine Paul’s prayer in Colossians 1:9-14, we learn about the importance of *praying for fruit*. Paul prayed two very specific requests for Christians he did not know personally that had to do with fruit. We ought to be praying these same requests for one another.

- I. We pray for God-centered thinking (9).
 - A. May God enable you to know His will.
 1. Prior to knowing Christ, we did our own thing.
 2. Now that we know Christ, what matters most is God’s will.
 - B. May God grant you spiritual wisdom and understanding.
 1. If you want to know God’s will, be careful where you seek your counsel.
 2. In order to know God’s will, make sure you are thinking spiritually.
- II. We pray for God-pleasing living (10-14).
 - A. We need to be bearing good fruit (10a).
 1. God has a high standard.
 2. Through Christ God raises us to that standard.
 - B. We need to be growing to know God better (10b).
 - C. We need to be strengthened with His power (11).
 1. The kind of life that pleases God requires what God alone can give.
 2. That’s why we need to live in dependence upon God every day.
 - D. We need to be giving thanks to our Heavenly Father (12-14).
 1. He has qualified us to share His inheritance (12).
 2. He has rescued us from the domain of darkness (13a).
 3. He has transferred us into the kingdom of His Son (13b).
 4. He has redeemed us (14a).
 5. He has forgiven us (14b).

Make It Personal: Let’s ask ourselves these questions.

1. Is doing the will of God what matters most to me?
2. Is there evidence that I am pleasing God with my life?
3. Am I grateful for what God did to make this possible?

We love opening the Book together at WBC! It’s by looking carefully at the Book that we behold the One we love, the One who loved us and rescued us.

A word about the title of today’s sermon, “*Praying for Fruit: Paul’s Prayer for the Church at Colossae*.” I could have entitled it, “Praying for the Knowledge of God”, for Paul certainly asks for that. Or “Praying for the Knowledge of God’s Will,” for he prays for that too. Or “Praying for Power,” or “Praying for Endurance and Patience and Joy,” for these are all petitions we see in this prayer. But I choose “Praying for Fruit”.

Why? For two reasons. First, Paul repeats the phrase “bearing fruit” twice in this passage (in verses 6 and 10), as you’ll see in a moment when we read the text. But secondly, when I was contemplating what word captures the essence of this prayer, I decided to read this passage in *The Message Bible*, which is essentially Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of God’s Word. It’s not a translation, but “The Bible in Contemporary Language”, as the subtitle indicates. Sort of like a commentary. What caught my eye immediately was the heading that Peterson used to sum up this section. He calls it, *Working in His Orchard*. That’s good. That’s exactly what Paul talks about in this text. There’s *work* taking place. Where? In *God’s orchard*.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the messages preached at WBC in 2008 and on 10/4/15.

Yes, God is working. God's servants are working. Paul is one of them. So is Epaphras as we'll see. So are the believers in Colossae. And what is the purpose of this work? Fruit. That's what you expect to see in an orchard. Not a nice building to house the tools. Not beautiful foliage. Fruit is the objective.

Likewise in God's orchard, the objective is fruit. And prayer is a vital part of this fruit endeavor. Hence the title, *Praying for Fruit: Learning from Paul's Prayer for the Church in Colossae.*"

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:3-14 (The Message)

³⁻⁴ Our prayers for you are always spilling over into thanksgivings. We can't quit thanking God our Father and Jesus our Messiah for you! We keep getting reports on your steady faith in Christ, our Jesus, and the love you continuously extend to all Christians. The lines of purpose in your lives never grow slack, tightly tied as they are to your future in heaven, kept taut by hope.

⁵⁻⁸ The Message is as true among you today as when you first heard it. It doesn't diminish or weaken over time. It's the same all over the world. The Message bears fruit and gets larger and stronger, just as it has in you. From the very first day you heard and recognized the truth of what God is doing, you've been hungry for more. It's as vigorous in you now as when you learned it from our friend and close associate Epaphras. He is one reliable worker for Christ! I could always depend on him. He's the one who told us how thoroughly love had been worked into your lives by the Spirit.

⁹⁻¹² Be assured that from the first day we heard of you, we haven't stopped praying for you, asking God to give you wise minds and spirits attuned to his will, and so acquire a thorough understanding of the ways in which God works. We pray that you'll live well for the Master, making him proud of you as you work hard in his orchard. As you learn more and more how God works, you will learn how to do *your* work. We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.

¹³⁻¹⁴ God rescued us from dead-end alleys and dark dungeons. He's set us up in the kingdom of the Son he loves so much, the Son who got us out of the pit we were in, got rid of the sins we were doomed to keep repeating.²

Several years ago I received a letter telling the story of Changjiu, a Chinese student who had come know to Christ and was baptized at Kossuth Street Baptist Church in West Lafayette, Indiana. Here is part of the testimony he gave at his baptism:

"Thanks God for his grace in the name of Jesus Christ, I have accepted the belief of Christian and seen the hope of life. With my heart rejoicing greatly, I am glad to give glory to God my Lord. Lord you are so powerful. I am such a sinner who deserves no salvation. But you gave great grace to me to know you, accept you, and praise you. This once again demonstrates that your love is broader than the sea.

"It is unbelievable that someone like me, who used to be a stubborn unbeliever, can accept God as the center of life. It is not because I worked hard to seek God and

² Peterson, E. H. (2005). [*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*](#) (Col 1:3–14). NavPress.

gained understanding of God, for ‘there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.’ (*The Bible*, Romans 3:11)

“I was born in China. My education from primary school to college repeatedly emphasizes one point that there is no God and our successes depend on ourselves...I laughed at God-believers and thought they spent their energy and passion in vain on worshipping something that does not exist and does not help.

“Things changed for me after I left my homeland and came to USA for my graduate study. In a foreign country, I had to adapt to a very different environment for study and living. The different life experience was also an opportunity for me to think about things from different perspectives. In April 2003, it was the first time I went to a Christian church by the invitation of my friends. I did not intend to go to the church to worship God but to eat a free dinner. The people I met there were very nice and talked about God with me...I started to learn Bible with Paul Briggs from January 2007. I really thank God who arranged such a patient and faithful teacher for me. Paul said he is just like an audience who was given the privilege to sit in the front row to see how God was working on my life...”³

I love to hear stories like that! To hear how God used a brother in Christ to introduce someone I’ve never seen to the life-changing person of Jesus Christ, now that’s thrilling!

That’s also a fitting backdrop for the prayer we’re investigating this morning. Paul wrote this letter to and prayed this prayer for Christians he had not personally led to Christ. He’d merely heard about them from a man named Epaphras who himself had come to know Christ under Paul’s ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10; Col. 1:7-8; 4:12). Epaphras consequently took the gospel message to Colossae⁴, apparently his hometown, and saw the Holy Spirit grant saving faith to many. Some time later, Epaphras traveled to see Paul, who was in prison in Rome, and told him what God had done in Colossae. In response Paul wrote this letter, the epistle to the Colossians, and the first thing he tells them is what he’s been praying for them, his spiritual grandchildren.

Any grandparents here? We might consider praying this for our own grandchildren.

Notice Colossians 1:9, “For this reason, since the day we *heard about you*, we have not stopped praying for you.” That’s interesting. Paul cared and prayed for people he’d never met. Paul was in Rome, hundreds of miles west of the young believers in Colossae, but just hearing about them moved him to pray continually for them. Why did he pray for them? He mentions several reasons in the previous verses—because they’re *brothers* (verse 1), because they believe in the same person he believed in, namely Christ (verse 4), because they were exhibiting *love in the Spirit* (verse 8), all of which means Paul knew he’d be spending eternity with these people!

Beloved, we who know Christ are a part of something big, a big, world-wide family that God is growing daily. It behooves us to see beyond ourselves, to pray beyond ourselves, to pray for the people we know, but also for our brothers and sisters we may never meet.

“Pray what?” you ask. As we examine Paul’s prayer in Colossians 1:9-14 we discover the apostle praying two very specific requests for Christians he did not know personally, and we ought to be praying these same requests for one another, and others.

³ Taken from monthly EBM letter from W. Paul Jackson, May 2008.

⁴ Colosse, also the hometown of Philemon, was situated twelve miles from Laodicea. Many Jews lived there.

Last time in our study of Paul's prayer for the church in Philippi, we saw a dual emphasis in Paul's prayer, observing first that he brought a gospel-shaped *perspective* to prayer, and secondly that he offered gospel-shaped *petitions*. We see the same dual emphasis here in Colossians, as Paul shares his gospel-shaped *perspective* in verses 3-8, and then expresses his gospel-shaped *petitions* in verses 9-14.

Our focus today will be on the two petitions. Both are vital in praying for fruit. We pray for **God-centered thinking** (9). We pray for **God-pleasing living** (10-14).

I. We pray for God-centered thinking (9).

Verse 9 says, "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."⁵

It's interesting that Paul's prayers for the various churches, while similar in some ways, were expressed differently. For the church at Philippi, he asked God to give them an abounding love and growing discernment. For the church in Ephesus, he asked God to help them know Him better. His prayer for the Romans was that God would grant him an opportunity to come and impart to them some spiritual gift for their strengthening. In his prayer for the Thessalonians, he asked God to grant an open door for the advancement of the gospel. For the Corinthians, he prayed for perfection. And what was it he asked God in behalf of the Colossians? Right here we see the essence of his prayer.

A. May God enable you to know His will. Paul was fervent in asking God to grant this request. From the day he first heard about the Colossians' faith until the present day he and Timothy had not stopped praying for them, and specifically, had not stopped asking God to fill them with the knowledge of His will.

Why did he pray this particular request? It's because *prior to knowing Christ, we did our own thing*. That's what sin is, in its essence, going *our own way* (Isa. 53:6). From birth life is all about *us*.

We spent some time recently with our two little grandbabies. I was reminded again that we don't have to teach our children to think about themselves. If they're hungry, they let you know. If they're uncomfortable, they let you know. If they're bored, they let you know. "Hey, I've got needs down here! Do something about it, and soon!"

Figuring out what *we* want is no problem for us. That's part of the sin-nature package we've inherited from Adam. But figuring out what *God* wants, now that's a different story. We don't enter the world thinking, "I wonder what God wants me to do right now." For instance, when I'm a two-year-old toddler and I see a toy in the church nursery, my instinctive thought is not, "What would please God most right now? Should I share this toy or play with it myself?" No way. Prior to knowing Christ, life is all about *us*, so consequently we did our own thing.

However, *now that we know Christ, what matters most is God's will*. That's part of the fundamental change that Christ makes when He saves us and comes to live in us. If anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*; old things pass away and all things become new (2 Cor. 5:17). And that includes our life-orientation. Life's no longer about doing our own thing. If we're in Christ now, we live to please God, and to do that we must know what pleases God, which means we must know *His will*.

⁵ NIV84 "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

“To do the will of God in this passage is virtually synonymous with obeying what God has mandated,” writes D. A. Carson. “What God has mandated is his will; our responsibility is to do it.”⁶

That’s what Paul prayed for his friends in Colossae. *May God enable you to know His will.* Epaphras, who himself was known for his wrestling in prayer, offered a similar prayer request according to Colossians 4:12. “Epaphras...is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”

This leads to the question, “Since knowing God’s will is so important, how do we discern it?” Paul tells us in his prayer request. Notice the end of verse 9. “In all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” The NIV says, “Through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” D. A. Carson observes that the Greek preposition translated “through” carries the sense “which consists of,” and concludes, “The knowledge or perception of God’s will consists of spiritual wisdom and understanding.”⁷

This is what praying for God-centered thinking sounds like. First, may God enable you to know *His will*. Second, may God grant you *spiritual wisdom and understanding*.

B. May God grant you spiritual wisdom and understanding. How do we discern God’s will? God’s will is His pleasure. It’s what pleases Him. We don’t discern it by listening to a podcast or reading Wall Street Journal. Paul says that God’s will is connected to spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Spiritual wisdom. Let that sink in. *Spiritual*. The wisdom associated with the Spirit. We make sure we are thinking according to the mind of the Holy Spirit.

How do we know the Spirit’s mind? Through the Book He has given us. Peter explains in 2 Peter 1:20-21, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were *carried along by the Holy Spirit*.”

In the pages of the Bible, the Spirit of God has revealed the will of God to us, the pleasure of God. This is basic, yet critical and ever so practical.

To know God’s will, we must know His Word. What matters most is not what people say, but what He says. We need to discern His assessment, His will, His pleasure.

To know His will, we must think spiritually which means *think biblically*. I appreciate D. A. Carson’s frank assessment, “People cannot live by bread and Jacuzzi alone.”⁸ We desperately need God’s Word because apart from God’s Word we will not know God’s will.

But herein lies a fundamental problem. Bible illiteracy in our country. It’s true that a person can know the Bible and still choose to disobey it and thus disobey God’s will. But what if a person doesn’t know the Bible? That person will base his understanding of what God’s will is on church tradition, or family opinion, or gut feeling, or a cloud in the sky, or some other subjective source.

“I know God wants me to marry this person because I was driving down the road and saw a sign with her initials on it, and felt tingling up and down my spine.”

⁶ D. A. Carson, p. 101.

⁷ D. A. Carson, pp. 102-3.

⁸ Carson, p. 103.

But why did Paul pray this particular request for this particular church? Why is he asking God to help them know His will in the first place? It's because of something that was taking place *inside* the church, namely false teaching.

The false teaching came from a mixture of three sources: 1) A dangerous Jewish heresy 2) A pre-gnostic notion that there exists advanced teaching for the spiritually elite (see 2:18-19), and 3) Asceticism, the view that the body is evil, so true redemption applies only to the spiritual (see 2:20-23).⁹

Remember, this was a young church and consequently these were young believers who were perhaps somewhat gullible and fair game for a fast-talking teacher who called himself "Christian." R. C. Lucas observes, "The danger for the enthusiastic young convert comes from error *within* the churches, teaching that is largely, even emphatically, Christian, but *which has been influenced more than it knows by the spirit of the age.*"¹⁰

When we're thinking according to the spirit of the age, we'll not think according to the mind of the Spirit. Therefore, we will not discern God's will.

So here's an important question for all of us. Are we thinking spiritually? One way to tell is to examine our prayer list. What kinds of things did we pray for in the past seven days? Our list may include safety on the roads, the improved health of our child or relative, a better job, help in dealing with a critic, money to pay our bills, and a good night's sleep.

Now compare our prayer list with Paul's. Do they resemble each other? How do we account for the difference? To borrow from Lucas again, *we have been influenced far more than we know by the spirit of the age.* Who says that health, job, money, peace with people, and the good life are what matters most? The world does, but not God. In His Word, God says that what matters most is knowing His will and doing it.

What does this have to do with fruit? Everything. Remember, this is God's orchard and He desires fruit from it. But we won't desire fruit if we don't have His mind. And so Paul prayed this request for the Colossians, and we should pray it for ourselves and each other. We pray for *God-centered thinking*.

II. We pray for God-pleasing living (10-14).

The prayer continues in verse 10. In the ESV, "So" [the NIV says, "in order that"]. Here's the intended result of a prayer for God-shaped thinking. "So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

It's not enough merely to *know* God's will. We must *do* it. Much damage is done to the cause of Christ by those who claim to know Him but don't live to please Him. Paul knows this. He prays that God would grant the Colossians not only God-centered *thinking* but also God-pleasing *living*.

Which raises an important question. What does God-pleasing living look like? Paul uses four participles to give us the answer. *Bearing fruit* (10a), *increasing* (NIV *growing*; 10b), *being strengthened* (11), and *giving thanks* (12). These four participles modify the purpose clause in verse 10 and show us in living color four traits of a God-pleasing life.

A. We need to be bearing good fruit (10a). This is the first participle, "Bearing fruit in every good work." Do our good works save us? Certainly not. To be saved from

⁹ Taken from R. C. Lucas?

¹⁰ R. C. Lucas, *The Message of Colossians and Philemon*, p. 21 (emphasis his).

our sins we must believe in the person that God sent to take care of our sin problem, His Son. We are saved by Christ's work, not ours. But once He saves us, we do work.

In a God-pleasing life, we bear fruit in *every* good work. That's a pretty comprehensive word. *Every*. The God-pleasing life is not, "Well, I did three good works last week, so I'm allowed to do my own thing a couple of times today." No, pleasing Him matters *all the time*.

You say, "Wow! God's standard is high! I'm not sure I can attain it." Indeed, it is high. And the solution isn't to lower His standard. That certainly doesn't please Him, to tamper with His Word to make it more manageable. But this does. *Through Christ God raises us to His standard*.

This is the gospel and throughout this letter Paul shows how this glorious gospel connects to life. For instance, he says this in Colossians 2:6-7, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, *continue to live in him*, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

Yes! The gospel enables us to live differently. It produces fruit in us. What kind of fruit? Paul just gave some examples in verses 3-8. Faith in Christ. Love for the saints. Hope for the future. Sharing Christ with others, as Epaphras did.

This is the first trait of a God-pleasing life and Paul made it a matter of prayer. Lord, help the believers in Colossae to bear fruit in every good work.

Here's a second trait of a God-pleasing life and a second prayer request.

B. We need to be growing to know God better (10b). In the middle of verse 10, "And increasing in the knowledge of God." If you have received the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, you know God, for Jesus said in John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Yet when it comes to knowing God, we never arrive. There's always more to know for He is infinite. And Paul prayed to that end for the believers in Colossae.

William Penn said of George Fox, "But above all he excelled in prayer...The most awful, living, reverend frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his prayer. And truly it was a testimony. He knew and lived nearer to the Lord than other men, for they that know Him most will see most reason to approach Him with reverence and fear."¹¹

Those final words bear repeating. *For they that know Him most will see most reason to approach Him with reverence and fear*. There's a direct connection between your knowledge of God and your prayer life. Those who know Him *most* see most reason to *approach Him*. We need to know Him better, beloved. What steps are you taking to grow to know Him better? Do you know the Lord better today than you did a year ago?

C. We need to be strengthened with His power (11). Verse 11 says, "Being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy."

"*Being* strengthened," that's passive. The word indicates something that needs to be done to us from the outside. We need to receive God's strength. And He provides it when we ask, *according to His glorious might*. He is in a class all by Himself. He possesses glorious might.

Why do we need this strength and glorious might? Note the next phrase, "for all endurance and patience." It's not easy to live a God-pleasing life. There are hardships to face and trials to endure. The Christian life is *hard*, but it's a rewarding *hard*, a fruit-

¹¹ Source unknown (perhaps O. Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*)

bearing hard. And God graciously gives us the power that enables us to endure and persevere.

And to do so *with joy*. Don't miss that phrase. We don't just endure. The Lord enables us to endure hardship as He did. With joy. Delighting in our good Father who has ordained this difficult path.

Friends, this kind of life that pleases God requires what God alone can give. That's why this prayer is vital. We need to be strengthened with His power.

D. We need to be giving thanks to our Heavenly Father (12-14). Paul begins verse 12, "Giving thanks to the Father."¹² People who live God-pleasing lives are people who give credit where credit is due. They know that the only reason they are now pleasing God when once they lived to please themselves is because of what God has done and is doing in their lives. And for this they thank Him. Over and over, they thank Him. Joyfully they thank their Heavenly Father for His deeds in their behalf.

What deeds has God the Father done for us that deserves our never-ending thanks? In verses 12-14, Paul reminds the Colossians (and us) of five amazing activities the Father has worked in our behalf. "Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Let's ponder carefully these five activities and turn them into thanks.

1. *He has qualified us to share His inheritance (12).* We entered His family as bankrupt debtors. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the acknowledging of our spiritual bankruptcy is the first prerequisite to entering His kingdom. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3)." That's what we were. *Poor*. Spiritually poor. We had nothing to offer God that would merit His favor.

But in His grace, He did something. He *qualified you*, says Paul. For what? To *share in the inheritance*. Don't miss that. Not everyone is going to share in God's inheritance in the life to come. Only those whom the Father has qualified will do so.

Yet not just any inheritance. Paul identifies it as "the inheritance *of the saints*." This is true in two ways and I'm not sure which Paul has in mind, perhaps both. *The saints* for Paul often refers to Abraham's descendants, *Jewish* believers. But in Christ, Gentile believers receive the same inheritance as Jewish believers (see Ephesians 2:11-22). He did this *for you*, says Paul, speaking directly to the Gentile believers in Colossae.

The other way is to understand what the term *saints* means. It's literally the 'holy ones.' To receive God's inheritance, one must become a *holy one*, a *saint*. Again, if we're in Christ, that is exactly what God says we are. We are holy in His sight.

Indeed, you are now "*in light*", says Paul at the end of verse 12. There are two kingdoms in the universe, my friend, and you are in one of them today. One is what Paul here refers to in the NIV as "the kingdom of light". In verse 13 he calls it "the kingdom of the Son." Only those who are in this kingdom will share in God's inheritance.

We weren't always in this kingdom, Paul reminds us. There's another kingdom, the one to which we *used* to belong until the Father intervened.

2. *He has rescued us from the domain of darkness (13a).* Ever since Adam and Eve sinned against God and plummeted the human race under God's curse, every man, woman, and child has entered this world as a citizen of the kingdom of darkness (see

¹² The NIV says, "And joyfully giving thanks to the Father."

Eph. 2:1-3). That's where we were, brothers and sisters. We were without hope in the dominion of darkness, and we would still be there had not God taken the initiative. God in His mercy went on a rescue mission. His intent? To deliver helpless sinners. "He has *rescued* us," says Paul, "from the dominion of darkness." But that's not all.

3. *He has transferred us into the kingdom of His Son (13b)*. Transferred—that's the term used in the ESV. The KJV says He 'translated' us. We started in the kingdom of darkness, but we're no longer there. We now belong to a different kingdom, the One God the Father brought us into. And I love Paul's descriptive phrase at the end of verse 13 where he tells us that the Father brought us into the kingdom of *His beloved Son*. The Father loves His Son. That's why the Father qualified us, rescued us, and brought us into this kingdom in the first place, because He loves His Son. We are the Father's love-gift to His Son. We exist for His Son now and forever.

Here's what's mind-boggling. In order for the Father to make much of the Son He loves, He asked His Son to something, to do a work in our behalf described in verse 14.

"In whom [that's referring to the Son He loves mentioned at the end of verse 13] we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

This is our story, beloved. This is what has happened to us for which *thanksgiving* is the proper response. The final two activities the Father accomplished in our behalf He accomplished through the work of His Son. Here they are.

4. *He has redeemed us (14a)*. That means He paid a price to set us free. The price? The Father handed over His own beloved Son to die, so that by means of His Son's death on the cross He might *redeem* a people for the glory of His Son. And not only has He redeemed us, but through His Son's work He has *forgiven* us.

5. *He has forgiven us (14b)*. He no longer holds our sins against us because His Son paid the full and just penalty for those sins. And to prove that His Son's death was sufficient for our redemption and forgiveness, on the third day after grieving hands lay the Son's lifeless body in the tomb, the Father raised His Son from the dead. And forty days later He welcomed Him home to His heavenly throne. And one day soon, perhaps today, the Father will send His Son back to earth to finish His Father's plan by rewarding those who have trusted in Him and punishing those who have rejected Him.

"If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic," writes D. A. Carson, "he would have sent an economist. If he had perceived that our greatest need was entertainment, he would have sent us a comedian or an artist. If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, he would have sent us a politician. If he had perceived that our greatest need was health, he would have sent us a doctor. But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death; and he sent us a Savior."¹³

Beloved, these are all past tense accomplishments. They are facts. They're realities that are true of us if we know Christ. The Father had qualified us to share in the inheritance. He has rescued us from the domain of darkness. He has transferred us into the kingdom of His Son. Through His Son He has redeemed us, and He has forgiven us. All past tense, and all true, and all reasons for us to give thanks.

Most of us don't thank the Father enough for His deeds. Part of our problem is that we don't stop long enough to ponder what He's done for us. We take Him for granted. May I encourage you, as I do so to my own heart, to rehearse God's works often. Take

¹³ D. A. Carson, p. 109.

time daily to think of what He's done for you, and especially what He did at the cross. Sing of His accomplishments in your behalf. Sing with William Cowper, *There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins, And sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their filthy stains.*

So how do we pray for Christians we've never met? Here's a great place to start. Let's pray for fruit in the Father's orchard. And to that end let's pray that they would exhibit God-centered thinking and God-pleasing living.

Make It Personal: Let's ask ourselves these questions.

1. *Is doing the will of God what matters most to me?* Let's be honest with ourselves. Nothing is more important than knowing and doing the will of God, *nothing*.

2. *Is there evidence that I am pleasing God with my life?* If there is, thank God the Father for it, to the praise of His Son, for He accomplished it. If the evidence is lacking, let's look to Him today. Let's confess our sin to Him, and cast ourselves upon His mercy. Let's affirm that what Christ has done is sufficient to transform us into God-pleasers!

3. *Am I grateful for what God did to make this possible?* If we are, then let's thank Him continually.

Song of Response: #196 "*There Is a Fountain*" (all five verses)

This afternoon: Mid-summer fellowship dinner and community group

Community Group Questions:

1. This morning's message was entitled, "*Praying for Fruit: Learning from Paul's Prayer for the Church at Colossae.*" What is an orchard? What happens in an orchard that makes fruit possible?

2. In Colossians 1:9-14 Paul prays for a church he has never personally visited. One of his main prayer requests is that they *bear fruit*. After reading the passage, discuss together this question. What specific things would be an answer to this *prayer for fruit*? In other words, if God answered this specific prayer, what would be the evidence of it?

3. Let's spend time now praying for fruit in our church family, as well as in our own families and lives. Don't rush this prayer time. Have several people offer specific prayer requests as well as thanksgiving, following Paul's example in his prayer for the Colossians