

One Prayer

Today we are going to begin our study of Colossians. As I have said we are going to learn how to study the Bible by studying the Book of Colossians. We have been looking at 4 c's Content, Context, Connection and Conduct

We always start out with Content. What does the passage contain? What do we see when we look at the passage?

In the passage today, I want to show you how to see links and lists.

We all know what lists are....we make grocery lists, to do lists...lists we understand.

Links are words that are used to connect two thoughts. This and that...If this then that...So that....because of....in order that....And so....therefore....these words are used to link two thoughts.

When you read a passage of Scripture....after you read it a few times....begin highlighting any linking words that you see. Get in the habit of paying attention to them. Then always get in the habit of numbering lists.

On the first pass through a Scripture, I want to encourage you to focus on how it makes you feel...not what it means. When You read this passage....what do you feel?

Colossians 1:3–14 (ESV)

Audience answer time

Paul has a deep love and concern for these people. You can feel the emotions in his words. We always thank God....When we pray for you. He is so proud of them How they are growing in their faith and bearing fruit....How they understood the grace of God in truth. He says we thank God for you. We pray for you. We pray for specific blessings from God for you.

You can imagine how desperately his heart longs to be with them. He is trying to find the right words to express what his heart feels. They are constantly on his mind He has not ceased to pray for them What is amazing is not just his heart and love for them But the fact that he has never met them.

Paul is writing a letter to people he has never met and his heart is overflowing with thankfulness, joy, love, and blessings. You would think that he is writing to his best friend from childhood, or his spouse from a war zone, or his family from prison....wait that one is true.

The first thing to pay attention to when you read a passage for the first time is what emotion does it make me feel? Is it love? Correction? Conviction? Joy? Peace? Amazement? Writers write to convey their emotions. Too often we think too much on our first pass through and miss the emotion of the passage.

Love, celebration, excitement,

Next lets look for linking words in this passage.

Verse 9 And so....Verse 10 So as....

When you see linked words take the time to reverse the flow. These are like equal signs and allow you to think about the passage in either direction.

We always thank God for you because of the hope that you have in heaven that you learned from Epaphras. AND SO....from the day we have heard we have not ceased to pray for you.

Reversed, We have not ceased to pray for you from the day we have heard and so we always thank God for you because of the hope you have in heaven that you learned from Epaphras.

Look at the second one. Asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all Spiritual wisdom and understanding....SO AS...to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord....

Reversed...To walk in a manner worthy of the Lord...I must be filled with the knowledge of His will in all Spiritual wisdom and understanding.

These are links. You see them a lot when God commands us to do something and then tells us what the blessing will be.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. As is the connector. If I reverse it...As I would have others do unto me I should do unto them.

The second thing I want you to begin to pay attention to are lists. Lists are very important in the Bible and we will go into this in more detail, but right now we are just seeing them.

Colossians 1:3–5 (ESV) 3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

First, did you notice the linking words? SINCE....

OK what about a list?

Colossians 1:3–5 (ESV) 3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of (1) your faith in Christ Jesus and (2) of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of (3) the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

First List...Faith, Hope and Love...Where have we seen that?

1 Corinthians 13:11–13 (ESV) 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Interesting..It is in the context of growing up Spiritually. We will see this again later.

Colossians 1:5–6 (ESV) 5 Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,

See any lists here?

Colossians 1:5–6 (ESV) 5 Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 (1) which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is (2) bearing fruit and (3) increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,

Colossians 1:7–8 (ESV) 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

See any lists here?

Colossians 1:7–8 (ESV) 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras (1) our beloved fellow servant. He is a (2) faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and (3) has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Colossians 1:9–10 (ESV) 9 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, 10 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;

What about lists here?

Colossians 1:9–10 (ESV) 9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking (1) that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to (2) walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: (3) bearing fruit in every good work and (4) increasing in the knowledge of God;

Colossians 1:11–14 (ESV) 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 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.

Last one today...Lists?

Colossians 1:11–14 (ESV) 11 being strengthened with (1) all power, according to his glorious might, for (2) all endurance and (3) patience with joy; 12 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.

So this section of Colossians can be studied just by looking at the lists...

We have heard of your Faith, Love and Hope.

The Gospel has come to you bearing fruit and increasing.

Epaphras is a faithful minister of Christ and told us of your love in the Spirit.

We pray that you will be filled with the knowledge of His will, walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Not only filled with God's wisdom but we pray that you are strengthened. with all power....all endurance and all patience with joy.

Sometimes you can just pull the lists out and it makes the text a bit easier to digest a bit at a time. Interrogate your list...

Why did Paul list these things? What do they have in common? Why were they important?

Do they seem to be listed in order of importance? Are they sequential?

What is not on the list that you would expect to be there? Is this list exhaustive or just one of examples? Why those examples?

For instance. In one of our lists...Paul says may you be strengthened with all power....that makes sense....all endurance...ok...but then patience with joy? Why did that make the list? What is it about the spiritual walk that requires patience with joy?

Now at the moment we are just learning to see the lists....to ask a few questions...we will get to some deeper list stuff later. But I hope that you can see....sometimes bringing the word into bite size lists can be helpful.

So just in this process...we have connected with the emotion of the writer.....the emotion that the text initially illicit in us....We see that the two paragraphs are linked with a connector and we see lost of lists.....These things will become second nature with time and effort. These are just three of a dozen or so things we are going to learn to look for. All of this is just in the First C Content.

My oldest son is about to become a father. I know what you are thinking....You and Tammy are so young....so youthfull and vibrant...How could you possibly be old enough to have a grandchild?.....I know...its crazy right? Anyway, I was speaking to him this week and thinking about how he is going to shape a new life. I found myself so excited for him. Because as he was talking about preparing a place for our grandchild.....I could remember the feelings that I had preparing for him.

I told him how incredible the journey was going to be.....How having a child is an incredible gift from God. And I found myself wanting to tell him just how hard it was going to be.....but I didn't. That was the part of love that he would have to discover on his own....You have invested so much in your children. Prayers, Hopes, Desires Time, energy and sleepless nights Financial resources Nurturing, protecting, guarding Encouraging, correcting, inspiring Disappointment, missed opportunities, and yet amazing successes

At times making tough decisions that were not popular Constantly wondering if what you have done is enough...even when they are adults with their own children. It seems impossible to put all those memories and emotions into words.

You never stop wanting to protect them. You know that God has given them to you and that one day you needed to let Go and Let God. But it is really hard. You wonder constantly if what you did was enough. Did you prepare them for everything?

I found myself this week thinking about the example I set for my son. Is he prepared for fatherhood? Will he learn from my mistakes and hopefully build on the things that I did well? My grandchild will face a very different world than the one I faced or my son faced. Honestly, I am glad it is not me.

From the moment that I heard that God was going to bless us with a child I have been praying...praying every day for my children....for their future spouses...and yes for my grandkids yet to be.

Tammy and I have three children and they are far away....One in Chicago...On in NYC...and one in Nashville. They are all pursuing their God-given passions. We can't really visit them right now...but our prayers can.

I pray for the salvation of my children over 60 times each day and have for years. I always set up my computer password to include all three of their names or initials. As I enter my password..with each name...I begin praying. While I am waiting for the computer to boot...I pray for them.

Being an elder or pastor is like that too. Sometimes you feel like a parent. Knowing that you have a short time to help people grow spiritually until they learn to feed themselves and you release them to God. Hours in prayer. Nurturing, protecting and guarding Time, energy and sleepless nights Encouraging, inspiring, correcting. Disappointment, missed opportunities, and amazing successes At times making tough decisions that were not popular Constantly wondering if what you have done is enough

Several of my passwords include Remnant and when I enter them, I begin praying....either for our church or for someone in our church.

I think these prayers made me, in a small way, identify with what Paul felt like. He had a deep love for those he was called to Shepherd and he was not able to be there. Paul is thousands of miles away in Rome under house arrest awaiting trial and probably expecting death

Yet in those difficult moments His thoughts are not on his situation His thoughts are on those he has cared for Those he may be leaving behind. So when Paul tells the Colossians.....

Colossians 1:9 (ESV) 9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you,

I immediately know that I am not praying enough. We are going to look today at Colossians 1:3-14. So go ahead and turn there in your Study Bibles.

When I read this text for this sermon, I was struck by how important it was to Paul to have the right words. To share with these people he had never met about how much he loves them, how proud he is of them, and how he is so thankful for their future.

Each time that you go through a text...it seems to me that God connects it to your heart. That is where the lessons are learned. Pay very close attention to how God stirs your heart with emotions.

That is in many ways, the process that God leads me through as I prepare a sermon each week. God makes it clear that for us to be transformed, He must work on our heart. So He is often leading me to connect with you on an emotional level as well as an intellectual one. So once again this week.... I find myself once again praying for the right words. Trying to take what is in my heart and share it with you. I am trying to find the words for our church. Constantly praying for our church family. We have been through all kinds of circumstances....all kinds. They shape us and are learning opportunities from God for us.

At the same time, recently I am trying to find the words for my son....for my children. They all left home years ago....but they never left...you know? Behind Jesus and their Mom, they are the most important people in my life. My son will soon discover the depth of love that a parent has for their child. You can't prepare for it. It just happens. I never understood the depths of God's love for me until I became a parent..then it became apparent.

So many emotions to capture. When I spoke to my son, I tried to find the right words....Inspiring words. Encouraging words. Words that carry insight and wisdom....Words that he would always remember Words that express the love and hope that his Mom and I have for them. Words that one day may move his heart to experience the fullness of God's love for him and his family.

I found myself thinking about the perfect prayer for my Son...For his family....If I could pray one prayer for Him and one prayer only for the rest of my life....what would it be?

Then God showed me a prayer that is over 2000 years old. Written from Rome...by a man named Paul..to a people he loved...people that he could not be with...separated geographically but still linked at the heart.

Colossians 1:9–12 (ESV) 9 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,

Paul first prayed that they would be filled...filled with knowledge...not worldly knowledge...but filled with all Spiritual Wisdom, Understanding and the knowledge of His Will....

There were people at Colossae, and our society is full of them, who are puffed up with human knowledge. They have information, lots of it, but not understanding. Oh sure, they think they understand things, but the best they can do is to understand things within the limits of being human. In this letter, Paul will be warning the Colossians about false teachers. Not the gnostics this time....another group of false teachers who thought that they knew all there is to know about God.

Sometimes watching the History Channel or Discovery channel and seeing religious scholars with human degrees....talk about a God that they have never met....It is like saying that my dog understands all that there is to know about being a human.

She understands it the best she can as a dog...but she is limited.

She sees me leave each day, come back home, feed her, play with her...She may in her little dog brain even seem to connect with my emotions...She may seem to understand some things....She may even convince the other dogs in our home, while we are away, that she knows all about us....

But for my dog to get puffed up with knowledge about the human life.....is a joke..On her best day, she knows nothing about what it is like to really be a human being. Even if she has all the other dogs in the world fooled with her expansive understanding and research into the human experience...she can't fool me....She is a dog..with a dog brain...the same brain that tells her how to greet other dogs.

In the same way....there are humans...who think they know all that they need to know about God. They have never experienced God....They have theories, research, observations, and explanations...but on their best day...they are just humans...with little human minds. All of us can only know about God what He chooses to reveal to us about Himself.

Our world is full of human experts who claim to have studied at the best human institutions....taught by the best humans...and thus are experts about God and Spiritual things. ..At times they convince many others of their expertise but the wisdom of the world is foolishness when it comes to spiritual things.

One night years ago a scholar, a well known Pharisee, and expert in law had an interaction with Jesus....Jesus tried to tell Nicodemus about Spiritual things, but his human mind was too limiting to understand.

John 3:9–12 (ESV) 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

Jesus tells Nicodemus that the things He is going to teach to the Word.....can't be learned solely with a human mind....Spiritual things must be learned in the Spirit....Taught by the Spirit...Revealed to humans from the throne of God in the Word of God.

Human knowledge puffs up but it never saves anyone.

John 5:39–40 (ESV) 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

How can you tell if a scholar is puffed up on human knowledge or has had a true salvation experience with God?

One word....brokenness. Or as God says....humility. No one truly experiences God and walks away with any sense of self pride.

You become immediately aware of the truth that you don't belong in His presence...that you don't truly know anything...and that you are undeserving and unclean. And yet...you are there....in His presence.

The prophet Isaiah came close to describing the feeling...

Isaiah 6:4–5 (ESV) 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

With the Spirit of God in us, we can understand the things that God chose to reveal to us in His Word. None of us have a full understanding of the Spiritual things.

1 Corinthians 2:12–14 (ESV) 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

God has revealed to us all that He desires that we know about Him. It is more than enough to have unwavering faith in Jesus. The Spiritual truths...the gold if you will...is only given to those who are Spiritual. Those without the Spirit of God will never understand the things of God. The Spirit of God is the encryption key that opens up the deeper truths.

Even as believers, we only understand what God has revealed to us about Himself. And we do so in a limited human way.

The best that we can do is to pray for more and more understanding and to walk in what we can understand from God. One day when we are no longer in our human limitations we will know it all.

1 Corinthians 13:11–12 (ESV) 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

So Paul is not praying for the believers at Colosse to grow in human wisdom....

Colossians 1:9–12 (ESV) 9 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,

Notice that Paul is praying that they are filled with the knowledge of His will....but not human knowledge....ALL spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Wisdom is knowing the truth...understanding is knowing the deeper revelations of the truth.

Why does Paul want them to be full in all spiritual wisdom and understanding?

Key Connector..."So That" Like a sign telling you to reverse the verse.

Colossians 1:9–12 (ESV) 10 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;

Paul wanted them full of Spiritual wisdom and understanding because it would produce three results
1) They would live out their lives...their actions...would honor God and be pleasing to Him. 2) All that they do...their work...would be productive ..and reflect God in their lives. and 3) Along the way they would grow in their understanding of God.

That is an incredible way to live...but Paul prays for even more....

He knows that along the way...life gets hard...really hard. That just like we can't depend upon human understanding for truth...we can't depend upon human strength to get us through. We are in a fallen world....We need God's strength to hold on...not ours.

Colossians 1:11 (ESV) 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

Paul prays that we will not only walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, but we will also be given all of God's Spiritual power.....for all endurance and patience.

Knowing what we can know about God...trusting Jesus with everything...being filled with God and all things God...does not guarantee a wrinkle free life on earth. Following Jesus is really hard. It costs a great deal here on earth.

We are going to have times that we must just endure. We are going to have times that test our patience....We are going to need a power that is greater than human power.....we are going to need His glorious might. We are going to need His joy.

Colossians 1:12–14 (ESV) 12 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.

Paul prayed not only would they live lives full of joy....but also gratitude. The kind of broken humble gratitude that comes from realizing that Jesus did for you what you could never do for yourself. God has qualified us to share in the inheritance. It not something we have done...it is all God...and thus we live our lives constantly giving thanks to the Father.

He is the one who saved us....delivered us from the domain...the kingdom of darkness....and transferred us to the Kingdom of Jesus....as saints in the light...

We have been....though Jesus and our trust in Him...redeemed and forgiven.

If I was limited to one prayer for my family for the rest of my time on earth...this one is it. This is my prayer for my son, for his brother and sister...For his wife and for our grandchild....If I could ask God for one blessing it would be this prayer...

That they would come to know all Spiritual Wisdom and Understanding that comes from His Will....and then...as a result of that revelation....they would live their lives to honor Him. All along depending upon His power, endurance and patience....doing good work and growing in the knowledge of God. And the whole time, thanking God....thanking Jesus...for saving them from darkness and bringing them into the light.

In this short prayer, Paul has captured the key to life.

So these words, written 2000 years ago.... Were first written to the believers at Colossae But they speak to this congregation as they did that one Paul wanted to make sure that they experienced all that God had for them I pray that for all of us

But there is another lesson to learn in this passage Not really something Paul said But rather something that Paul did It was such a natural part of who he was That he likely would not have thought of it as part of this message

Paul was a man of prayer. He prayed constantly. He was always in direct communication with God. I think he probably prayed in his sleep. It seemed as natural to him as breathing

I want to be like that. I want to spend my day in constant dialogue with the Holy Spirit. I want to pray until I have a love for people that is so deep that it hurts. I want to pray until I feel as though I know people I have never met. I want to pray for people I see on the news....people I hear about who are in trouble...people who are in leadership roles...

Three verses in to Colossians and I am already convicted that I am not a man of prayer. I pray for those whom I love....my wife, my kids, my family, my grandchildren to come, my church family.....but Paul prayed for everyone. His first reaction to everything was to talk to God about it.

And yet the only thing keeping me from being just like Paul in this area....is me. I know that I need to extend my prayer reach. I need to pray for my enemies, I need to pray for the lost that will fill these chairs, I need to pray for people in other countries, pray for missionaries, pray for our leaders, our teachers, our police officers, those in sex trafficking, those with addictions, those contemplating suicide, those struggling with mental illness, those people who annoy me in traffic,

those people who I annoy in traffic, the server at the restaurant, the people who robocall my phone, Democrats, Republicans, Black Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter, All Lives Matter....and I don't mean just pray...I mean pray until I have a deep love for them. Even if I totally disagree with them. I need to pray until I love them....until I care more about their salvation than I do about their opinion. Until I care more about their salvation than I do about my vengeance. Until I care more about their salvation than I do my pride. Until I care more about their salvation that I do.....anything else.

I want to challenge you to make a list....check it twice....and then I want you to pray this prayer for each person or group on your list...Let me give you an example..

God, I pray for all the people who are rioting in the streets of our cities. Who are destroying the property and life work of other hard working people. Who are using violence instead of their voice....God I am asking that they may be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 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. 11 May they be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 12 giving thanks to the Father,

As you pray this prayer...you will discover that it sets your heart up for further discussion with God. You begin seeing them in the streets of heaven one day praising God...hands lifted in celebration rather than destruction. You begin to see them the way God sees them. The way He sees all of us. Humans whom He loves who are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

As you pray for them, you begin to understand that they are people, just like you, who have been deceived by Satan. God shows you that your issue is not with them, but rather you are in a spiritual battle against a common enemy. You realize after you pray long enough for them that you are not in conflict with them, you are in spiritual conflict with the one who has imprisoned them. You are in the gap praying for them because they don't know to pray for themselves.

Commit to taking steps to become a person that prays without ceasing Expand your prayer focus beyond yourself Maybe start by joining others in prayer Commit to joining us on Wednesday Nights As we come together to pray Maybe your thinking I don't pray out loud with strangers...That's ok. Come listen to strange people pray....You can learn how to pray and get comfortable praying by listening to others

We are learning how to see the deeper truths that God reveals to those who study His Word and Abide with Him. But let me close today with this thought. As you pray for others...truly pray for them...something happens to you....

You will be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him:As you keep praying....you will bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;And as you continue to pray for others you will be flooded with gratitude....giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Here is the gold that God wants me to share with you today. The key to having this prayer answered in your life....is to keep praying it for others.

When you get on your knees....and ask God to see people the way He sees them....you become burdened for the salvation of everyone who does not know Jesus.....truly burdened...God fills you with Spiritual wisdom and understanding. He strengthens you with His power....and as you rise from your knees...you walk more in a manner worthy of the Lord. Let's Pray.