

Capital City Christian Church  
Sermon Series: Colossians: “Praying Under Pressure”  
Col. 1: 3-14

Good morning, last week Doc kicked off a new series based on the letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church at Colossae. Doc made the point that Paul is a credible author and personal witness to the mighty power of Jesus Christ. So because of his credibility, we should take to heart the letter Paul wrote to the Jesus followers at Colossae. So, let’s dive right into this inspired letter with these question...

Why do we pray? What do we expect from our prayers? Is prayer important to us? Do we pray to inform an omniscient God of something He doesn’t already know? Things like our financial situation – our marriage problems – our aches and pains or the troubles that plague our world.

The Barna Group surveyed 1015 people between June 5th and the 9th of 2017. The survey shows that 98% of all Americans pray? With this survey, they discovered 28% of Americans who claim to have no faith preference, still pray – 25% claiming to be non-christian, also pray.

I find it very interesting the number of people who say they don’t believe, yet they pray. If you happen to fall into one of the two categories of non-believers, please don’t shut me out just yet, I have some great news for you to hear a little later, so bear with me.

Let’s get back to the question at hand, “Why do we pray?” If we are brutally honest with ourselves, way too often we pray to get God to do what we want. We want to change God’s mind... We pray to God to get him to move in the direction we want Him to go... We tell God, “Here’s what I need you to do God. Can you take care of this situation for me?”

Imagine what God is thinking, “Oh, I didn’t know you needed this to happen, I’ll get right on it!” Folks, I know it’s not like that, but some of the prayers we pray sure does have that feel, don’t they?

Let me run down another road. There are Christians who believe that life is preordained, better known as predestination, where every bit of life has already been planned. If you are one of those who believes that, then why do you pray? The outcome has already been settled.

Then there are those who believe prayer changes things; prayer can affect the outcome. They believe God can change His mind and be influenced by our intercessory prayer. Now, which best describes your view? Again, the question, “Why do we pray?”

Let me introduce a thought for you to ponder: Prayer is not about changing the mind of God, but about changing our mind.”

Prayer is not about getting God to do what we want; it is about wanting to know what God wants. The challenge for us this morning is to learn to pray BIG prayers, not just SMALL prayers. SMALL prayers are generally self-centered, we ask God to bless our finances – bless me with a better job – bless my children and grand-children – bless my marriage – help my husband not to be such a dork – (oops, I thought I left that out). You get the jest of it. This type of praying is important to us because it concerns the things we love and cherish. When we only pray SMALL prayers, we are praying to a SMALL God, But when we pray BIG prayers we recognize God is BIG God.

I want us to understand that praying BIG prayers is way more important than praying LITTLE prayers. Praying BIG prayers means we move on past just praying for our self-centered wants and situations, to asking God to grant us the wisdom and the knowledge to know His will in our lives. Hearing that statement may cause you to think, “Hold on Vern, I am not comfortable praying a BIG prayer like that! God may want me to quit my job and go on the mission field in South America, and I don’t speak a bit of South American!”

Praying to know God’s will for your life does not mean He will ask you to quit your job and become a missionary. Look with me at what the Apostle Paul writes concerning his prayers for the Jesus followers at Colossae:

Scripture Colossians 1: 3

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

Paul is in prison, and he chooses to pray for the Jesus-followers a Colossae rather than for himself. Paul lives in horrible conditions, He is under house arrest, he didn’t have some electronic bracelet on his ankle and housed in a one bedroom with a private bath B & B. No! He is bound with chains, possibly to a guard or to the wall – sleeps on a straw mat – does his private busy in a wood bucket or maybe in the corner - he doesn’t get three meals a day, he may not get food at all - so his friends bring in food to sustain him. Through his friends is how he sends his letters to Jesus followers in different churches.

Folks, if we were in this situation we would probably be begging our friends to pray to God for our release. But not Paul, he is thanking God when he hears the news that the Jesus followers at Colosse are allowing the gospel to make a difference in their lives and this news is very reason why he is praying for them. Paul writes...

Scripture Colossians 1: 4 - 8

because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras,

our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Please note Paul has not started praying for them just yet, but he is explaining to them why he remembers them in his prayers. Paul is praising God for what he has heard from his friend Epaphras concerning the Jesus followers at Colossae how they placed their trust in Jesus to guide their daily lives.

Paul doesn't even know these people, and yet he is praising God for them. He knows they are Jesus followers by the news he hears. Which makes me wonder when was the last time we thanked God for Jesus followers we don't even know? Here's a hot one!

When was the last time we thanked God in prayer for Jesus followers we don't even know?

We get all excited when UK breaks their 31 consecutive losses against Florida – or when the Cleveland Browns win a game. Yes, we get all excited about victories on earth but are we as equally as enthusiastic about spiritual victories, like Paul? He was praising God for the faith and good works of the Colossian Jesus followers.

Do we thank God for the Jesus followers in Haiti, in Uganda, or on the other side of Frankfurt? Are we thankful the gospel is spreading through these regions because of faithful Jesus followers? Or are we so tied up in our little self-centered world we have forgotten about other Jesus followers?

After Paul tells them WHY he remembers them in his prayers, he continues by telling the Jesus followers at Colossae HOW he prays for them.

Scripture Colossians 1: 9

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,

Please understand what we are about to unpack is a BIG prayer, not a little one. Also, remember BIG prayers are God-centered. The requests in Paul's prayer centers on spiritual blessings, not on material or physical matters. Of course, it is not wrong to pray about physical or material needs. However, spiritual needs are vastly more important. Remember earlier I said, "Prayer is not about changing the mind of God, but about changing our mind." When we pray BIG prayers, like this one, our will begins to come in line with His will.

The church at Colossae was dealing with the same issues we are dealing with today. The question is often, what works for you, not what works for God? You see when it comes to what we think the knowledge of God's will is, happens to be like a buffet table where you grab your plate, go through the line and pick out what you want. Oh, I will take a bit of modern culture, a bit of pop

psychology, just a bit of this religion, a little bit of morality, and you have just created your own designer knowledge of God's will.

When we do this, we genuinely do not understand or have the full knowledge of God's will because we have chosen what we want and have not chosen what God wants. Okay, Vern. How do I gain the knowledge of God's will? Where do I start? How do I begin? You begin by praying a BIG prayer asking God to reveal His will to your heart and mind. Please take note, this is not a one and done BIG prayer. Just like Paul told the Colossae Jesus followers he "continually prayed" for them to be filled with the knowledge of God.

We need to continually seek the knowledge of God's will, but we are not on that journey alone. God has given us the Holy Spirit to assist us in understanding His will. Listen to the words of Jesus.

Scripture John 16:13a

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.

God promises He will guide us to the truth of His will and grants us the wisdom to understand and to apply that truth. How do I know that? Look with me at James 1:5

Scripture James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

That's awesome! God has provided everything we need to gain the knowledge of His will – He provides us with the wisdom to understand His will and the strength to live His will through His Spirit! WOW! We have an awesome GOD!

However, the key to it all is to humbly pray a BIG prayer asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will. Don't be afraid to pray this type of BIG prayer, because this type of BIG praying will help you to grow spiritually. Remember, Paul was praising God when he heard of the Colossian's spiritual growth.

Doc mentioned last week that we hear so many differing opinions on spiritual issues from our neighbors, our friends, college professors, high school teachers, and yes, even preachers. So, who are we to believe when it comes to spiritual things? Psst, listen, I know (look left & right – lean forward) God and His Word! Why not look to the source rather than to some dude or dudette to develop your spirituality.

Paul's BIG prayer doesn't stop at the knowledge of God's will. He continues with the reason to be continually filled with the knowledge of God's will.

Scripture Colossians 1:10 - 12

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

Here we find the reason for the Colossae Jesus followers to be filled with the knowledge of God's will. So, they may live a life worthy of the Lord and to please Him. Folks, when you accept Jesus as Savior and are baptized into Him the journey doesn't stop there, it is just beginning. We are to grow in the knowledge of God's will and to allow that knowledge to direct our thoughts and actions. How many of us have taken an inventory at the end of the day to see if our thoughts and actions were pleasing to Jesus?

But wait a minute, that's backward. We should start our day with a BIG prayer asking God to mold our will to His will. Ask God for the wisdom to recognize temptations and for the strength to so no. Ask Him to grant endurance and patience we need to deal with people and situation that agitate us.

Folks I am not blowing smoke up your skirt when I tell you I start my day by asking God to grant me the wisdom and strength to be about His busy. So when I forget to do that, I find my day is tougher to handle than when I ask God to take control.

A BIG prayer is not some statement you memorize and recite. BIG prayers focus more on others rather than yourself. BIG prayers will strengthen your FAITH as you see God move in your life and in the lives of those included in your BIG prayer.

BIG prayers will help you to experience God's LOVE. Maybe we need to look at what LOVE means. LOVE is not a feeling; love is a decision, feeling is a byproduct of LOVE – You see, it is my decision to love you or not to love you. Our Lord told us to pray for those who persecute you and to do good to those who abuse you. As we pray BIG prayers for those who persecute us, we are allowing God to change our heart toward them and to come to a deeper understanding of God's love.

BIG prayers strengthens HOPE – The hope of a better life in heaven compels me to pray BIG prayers of hope for people suffering from life issues – illness – the death of a loved one. I pray they find hope in Jesus and not be overwhelmed with their situation. In turn, my hope is strengthened.

Earlier in the message, I asked for non-believers to not shut me out but hang on because I have some great news for you too. Well, here it comes.

Scripture Col. 1: 13 – 14

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

If you are one of those people who has used the buffet method for your understanding of God and His will, I want to pose this question to you.

If what you believe about God and His will is not true, would you want to know?

How do you measure your beliefs? Are they measured by some human standard or human philosophy? Why would you want to construct your spiritual beliefs on mere human intellect? God wants you to know the truth of who He is, and He knows His truth will set you free from human intelligence and create in you, a sense of being, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose.

God desires to bring you out of the darkness of human intellect into the glorious light of the knowledge of His will.

Tony Campolo was seated at a state prayer breakfast next to the governor and found that he was sympathetic but had never committed himself to follow Christ. "Why not?" asked Campolo. The governor honestly replied, "No one ever asked me." "Well, I'm asking you." To his surprise, the governor responded, "OK, I will."

Maybe no one has ever asked you to accept Jesus Christ and come into the light of the knowledge of His will, but I am. If you are ready to make that decision or have questions concerning your faith, during the next song, please come to talk to me, one of the other staff members, or one of our elders.

But before we sing, I want us all to pray a BIG prayer to God this morning, and I want to help us do that. Please pray for a family member, a friend, or someone setting close to you. Ask God to - fill them with the knowledge of His will – fill them with Your spiritual wisdom – so they may understand how important it is to live their life according to Your will and not their own. Please pray silently; then I will close.