

Praying for Others' Spiritual Progress

Colossians 1:9-14

Introduction: Steve mentioned on Sunday that most of us can think of other people that we really want to see walking more closely with Christ. It might be a friend, a child, our spouse, a coworker, or a neighbor. Some of them are already strong in their walks with Christ; but perhaps others are struggling or are not believers yet. When you look at their lives, you are convinced that they need to walk with Christ more than anything else. Obviously, there are a number of things that we can do to help encourage someone else to walk more closely with Christ (be an example, be a good listener and encourager, point them to Scripture, etc.), but one thing we must not forget to do is pray for them. In Colossians 1, the Apostle Paul gives us insight into how he prayed for the believers in Colossae. May Paul's example of praying for others spur us on in our own praying for those that we really want to see walking more closely with Christ.

Opening Question: Who is one person for whom you have a desire for them to walk more closely with Christ?

Read Colossians 1:9-14

1. What is the "reason" that Paul talks about in verse 9 that lead them to pray without ceasing for the Colossians?
2. Paul's central request for the Colossians is that they would be "filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (v. 9). What is your understanding of what this means?
3. The "so that" in verse 10 expresses the result of this central request. What does Paul say results from being filled with the knowledge of God's will?
4. In the second half of verse 10 through verse 12, Paul gives four aspects of walking in a manner worthy of the Lord. What four things does Paul mention?
5. What insights do these four aspects give you of what walking in a manner worthy of God actually looks like?
6. What truths does Paul communicate in 12b-14 that are the core reasons why we can joyously give thanks in all circumstances?
7. What can we learn about praying for others from Paul's prayer?

Steve said:

We should be convinced that our praying is vital for others' spiritual progress. Paul believed that praying for the Colossians was strategic and effective in their lives. He didn't devote himself to praying these big, bold, spiritual prayers for the Colossians to make himself feel good or because he was "supposed to." Rather, he believed that his praying could change their lives

Praying wasn't the only way Paul tried to influence the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will. He also wrote them this letter before us, explaining to them various aspects of the will of God. He also exhorted them to "let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (3:16). And so Paul tried to influence the Colossians through more than his praying. But ***his praying was essential.*** He believed that his prayers would have an impact in the Colossians' lives.

This is a rather foundational conviction for our praying also. If we don't believe that our prayers can have an impact in others' lives, we won't pray very much and we won't pray very well. This is where we need to allow the Scriptures to shape our thinking on prayer (as opposed to our limited experience or our emotions or our logic or whatever). Scripture couldn't be more emphatic about the efficacy of prayer. Jesus said this, for example, in John 15:7: *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

Prayer is one of the foundational things that God uses to bring about His will on the earth. When we want what God wants, and we pray the same, God is pleased to act. God doesn't ***have*** to act in response to our prayers, but He often does. It doesn't seem like a terribly efficient way to run things, but God has established something of a partnership in which He leads us to want and ask for things, and then He acts. Understanding and believing this is vital.

8. How convinced are you that your praying is vital for others' spiritual growth?
9. What does your current practice of praying for others' spiritual progress say about what you actually believe?
10. Is there anyone for whom you can say, "we have not ceased to pray for you" (v. 9)? If not, what do you think keeps you from this kind of prayer life?
11. What response do you sense God is calling from you in light of this passage?