

✠ **Corrective lenses**

- *Recently I was listening to a podcast about the many ways our lives have benefited from technology- focus was super-high tech things that may be on horizon... but in my own little story, the technology I've benefited from the most has been around a long time, and it's pretty simple. GLASSES.*
- *Without my glasses, my vision is blurry, distorted- things don't look as they actually are, and this prevents me from being able to function.*
- *For some glasses, the lenses are magnifying... make things bigger. For me, this won't work- this would just turn a small blur into a big blur. My lenses are CORRECTIVE- progressive- 4 different prescriptions- and they are a tech marvel.*
- *This idea of corrective lenses applies in life as well, doesn't it? There are times when how we see things- the LENS through which we look at life and try to understand things- can be distorted or just plain wrong. This leads to confusion, disillusionment, missing out on things, misunderstanding things and people. There are times we need our vision to be corrected.*
- *As people of faith, disciples- this applies to us as well. Even with the greatest sincerity, there are times when how we understand things- about God, about ourselves, other people- about how we live this thing called the Christian life... when our vision can be distorted, and we need our vision corrected.*
- *As it turns out, God has given us the ultimate set of corrective lenses... it is called SCRIPTURE.*
- *NOW- very possible to have distorted understanding of what scripture says/means- why we come to it consistently, humbly, intelligently, setting aside our own agendas, even preconceptions, with hearts and minds that foremost desire to hear and learn.*
- *BUT SCRIPTURE IS WHERE WE START- it is our source- it is our lens. If you've heard the phrase "a biblical world view", the key is BIBLE.*
- *SO, over these next two messages our text is bringing a corrective lens to what may be the biggest, most central, fundamental practice in all of Christian life- really, in any religious life- but at the same time is one of the most misunderstood if we hold this practice up to the teaching of the NT.*
- *WHAT TALKING ABOUT? PRAYER. Cut to chase...*

The lens of Christian culture sees prayer primarily as the means by which WE ask God to do things FOR us.

- *Direct way to say it, but it is true. Like some of you, I've been in countless times of prayer in almost countless churches, and while this is not ALWAYS the case, it is overwhelmingly the case- we view and practice prayer as a means of asking God to meet our needs- our needs as we understand them.*
- *Look at Christian books- listen to Christian radio- this will be the dominant understanding of prayer you will find.*
- *YOU MAY SAY... Scripture teaches us to bring our needs to God. AND IT DOES!...*

Philippians 4:6-7 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- **Powerful scripture- but even here, the main focus of Prayer is to bring us into a place of GRATITUDE, and the result of PEACE in our hearts and minds. Then, in the very next thought, Paul will famously say that he has learned to be content, at peace- in ANY circumstance, because it is GOD who gives Him strength. The entire focus of Philippians 4 is God's invitation for us to KNOW HIM, TRUST HIM, and be open what ONLY HE can bring us- peace, joy, hope, contentment.**
- **THIS is the overwhelming theme of prayer in the NT- knowing God, knowing Christ, receiving his nature and character, and participating in God's work...**

The lens of Christian culture sees prayer primarily as the means by which WE ask God to do things FOR us....

The lens of Scripture sees prayer primarily as the way we open our hearts for the work GOD desires to do IN us.

- **You see, BIBLICALLY, PRINCIPALLY, prayer isn't about God working from the OUTSIDE IN... bringing change into our external needs, which then leads us to faith, peace, and hope... RATHER,**
- **Prayer is PRINCIPALLY about God working from the INSIDE OUT.... Transforming us in our spirit and our soul- our mind, will, and emotions... bringing love, hope, wisdom- through FAITH- and this faith then leads to transformation in how we relate to our circumstances around us.**
- **This is the focus of Paul's prayer for the church in Colossae...**

Colossians 1:9-11 *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, ¹⁰ so 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, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience*

- **When Paul says 'For this reason', he is referring back to his thankfulness for the Colossians faith, hope, and love. Because of this his prayer for them is...**

✠ Unceasing

Colossians 1:9a *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.*

- **Paul's emphasis here is that his prayer is consistent, daily, and intentional. Last message we saw how this kind of ongoing prayer opens our hearts and minds for the Spirit's work, giving rise to gratitude.**
- **Likewise, this kind of prayer is an expression of LOVE. Paul prays not out of rote obligation, he prays continually because he LOVES this church, and he is confident of GOD's love for these believers- and as we will see, his prayer centers on the desire for these new disciples to come to know just how much it means that God truly loves them, so they will not fall prey to the false teachers who are seeking to diminish who Jesus is while elevating human pride, legalism, and elitism.**
- **And so, Paul begins by praying that God, by the Holy Spirit, will fill these believers with...**

✠ Knowledge, wisdom, and understanding

Colossians 1:9b *We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,*

- **THIS IS Exhibit A** of how the NT teaches us to pray- that God would give to us- **FILL us- with the knowledge of His will.**
- **NOW, it's IMPORTANT** we understand what Paul means by 'God's will'- **this is another NT concept often distorted.** We tend to think of God's will in terms of "what choice does God want me to make in this specific circumstance." Career path A or B...
- **But the greater emphasis here- and throughout the NT, is on the idea of Gods great purpose, who He is, what he is doing, how he is doing it.**
- **This is sometimes called (seminary word alert) God's DECRETIVE will- his great, unalterable purpose of the redemption of ALL THINGS that began in Genesis chapter 3, was fulfilled in Christ, and is now being worked out in human history.** This isn't just academic- this means that God's will for us will always be consistent with his work of bringing redemption to all people- something for us to think about when we consider our words and actions.
- **Another big NT theme of God's will is called his PRECEPTIVE will, as in precepts, or commands: how God calls us to live- expressing his nature and character- right here, right now, in the midst of life as it really is, whatever our circumstances may be.**
- **This brings up KEY point- the word for 'FILL'- that God would FILL us with the knowledge of His will- has a qualitative sense- the idea isn't that we would just receive intellectual knowledge of God's will, but that our lives- our actions, countenance- would be fully characteristic of God's will.**
- **Paul goes on to say God will do this through the WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING the spirit gives.**
- **Wisdom and Understanding here mean that this characterizing knowledge of God's redemptive purposes will penetrate, and bring transformation, into our ETHICS- HOW WE THINK, and how this wisdom works itself out in the practicality of how we live, how we relate to people.**
- **Another note worth mentioning- In his commentary NT Wright points out that wisdom- the ability to think, to consider, to employ our intelligence in regards to scripture, to God and other people- this is a gift from God that will be inherent in a person walking in a dependent relationship with God.**
- **Wright says "to 'grow up' in every way will include the awakening of intellection powers, the ability to think coherently and practically about God and his purposes for his people. Paul never places spiritual life against intellectual understanding.**
- **This is incredibly relevant right now, as there is a growing anti-intellectualism present in parts of the church, particularly where we see toxic and nationalistic blend of politics and pseudo-Christian theology.**
- **This is damaging to the church's witness and God's redemptive purposes. In Romans 12 Paul calls us to be transformed by the RENEWING OF OUR MINDS- to be people who are**

critical THINKERS, who LISTEN and CONSIDER, are willing to be challenged intellectually. In our relationship with Christ, God NEVER asks us to check our brains at the door.

- *Knowledge. Wisdom. Understanding. These are the result of a Spirit filled life, and a primary purpose of prayer is to ask God for this to happen.*
- *PAUL GOES ON- this knowledge, wisdom, and understanding has a direct purpose:*

Colossians 1:10a *so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way*

- *Paul prays that as a RESULT of being characterized by the knowledge of God's will, his purpose- and the Spirit's Wisdom and understanding at work in our lives... that we would be...*

✠ **Worthy of God and pleasing to God**

- *OK! Show of hands... when you think of last week, how many of you would say your lives were worthy of God, and pleasing to him in EVERY way?*
- *From one perspective this sounds like a crushing burden- who can live worthy of God and always please him? But this is the perspective of performance based acceptance, and God is NOT a God of performance based acceptance!*
- *Rather, this is an invitation into DEPENDENCE.*
- *Think of this image- loving parent teaching their toddler to, well toddle. To take the first steps and walk... child, eyes fixed on mom, slowly stands, takes two steps, then back down... DOES the parent say "I can't believe you! You're not worthy of me, you're not pleasing me!" NO, of course not! They parent understands, and they are absolutely filled with joy as the child looks to them, trusts them, and slowly, haltingly, takes their next steps.*
- *GOD KNOWS we will not reach perfection- in fact, at its core, being a disciple of Jesus is not about moral perfection- it is about TRUST, dependence, and yieldedness to the presence, life, nature and character of Christ within us.*
- *Essence of sin is not failure, stumbling, when we are following Christ, when our heart is saying "Lord, I'm tripping every third step here, but in my heart my desire is for your will to be done." Rather, the essence of sin is the prideful decision to follow ourselves instead of Christ- to say in our heart "God, I know I believe in you, but right now, my desire is for my will to be done."*
- *Like a loving parent watching their child learn to walk, what pleases God is for our hearts to be set on him, for us to KNOW HIM, look to Him, trust Him, and grow in our sincere DESIRE to OBEY him.*
- *And THIS IS KEY! Being worthy and pleasing to God isn't about PBA, but it WILL, BY DEFINITION, be transforming in HOW WE LIVE!*
- *Consider JAMES 3:13...*

James 3:13 *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*

- From a broader perspective of the NT, we could paraphrase James to say... “So you think you are wise and understanding? Then show this by HOW YOU LOVE... for HOW YOU HUMBLY LOVE THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU is the chief expression of God’s wisdom.
- NOW, Paul gives primary examples of what it looks like to live a life WORTHY AND PLEASING... The first is that IN CHRIST, our lives will be..

✠ Bearing fruit

so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: **Colossians 1:10b** bearing fruit in every good work,

- This is the practical outworking of what we just discussed: when our lives are led by the Spirit internally, when we are trusting and looking to God internally, this will be expressed through how we live externally.
- We see this metaphor of bearing fruit throughout the NT. Just as fruit is the inevitable product of a healthy plant, FRUIT in our lives is the inevitable result- both inwardly and outwardly- of a healthy, honest, dependent relationship with God.
- What this fruit IS- at its core, is the fruit of the spirit- the character and nature of Christ in us, expressed in how we feel, think, and act. HOPE. JOY. PEACE. LOVE. PATIENCE. COURAGE. CONTENTMENT.
- These are the fruit of God’s presence INTERNALLY, and they will be expressed in how we live externally, in relationship with others. Compassion. Service, kindness, generosity, GOOD WORKS. Making the lives of people around us BETTER. THIS IS what Paul is getting at here.. the fruit of Christ’s Spirit within us will first changes who we ARE, and will inevitably, and increasingly, bring God’s nature and character into what we DO
- And the amazing thing of God’s Grace is that we don’t have to be stressed about coming up with ‘good works’ in order to please God- we simply live with the expectation that God will give us opportunities to be His agents of goodness as we go through each day.
- This is another contrast between the Ethos of the first century church and today’s evangelical culture, which is borderline obsessed with strategic planning are large scale ministry which is increasingly dependent on elite, highly talented visionary leadership and lots of money.
- Compare this with what Paul proclaims in the incredibly encouraging passage in Ephesians 2...

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- This wasn’t written to the Apostles in Jerusalem or limited to church leadership- Paul wrote this to the very new communities of disciples in cities like Ephesus and Colossae, the common believers, who by growing in their God given wisdom and understanding, resulted in everyday lives that were worthy and pleasing to God, and were bearers of the Spirit’s fruit as they went about their daily lives. THIS IS HOW THE FIRST CENTURY WORLD WAS CHANGED- and this is how God will bring his Kingdom change into our world today.

- **OK... So Paul has prayed...**

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, **Colossians 1:10c** growing in the knowledge of God,

† Growing in knowledge

- **It sounds like Paul is being redundant, but he's not. Rather, this prayer is like a self-reinforcing and beneficial spiral...**
- **God reveals to us knowledge of his will- who he is, his redemptive purpose...By the Spirit we grow in understanding and wisdom of how God's will characterizes who we are... WHICH results in our lives being pleasing to God in how we LOOK TO HIM, desire to live in OBEDIENCE, which takes on life- bearing fruit in the THINGS WE DO- Good works- which in turn leads us- by experience in partnership with scripture- into a deeper knowledge and understanding of God.**
- **EXAMPLE... From where I am in my journey-**
- **Over the past year I believe God has been convicting me, challenging and growing my concept of what it means that HIS NATURE, HIS GREAT purpose- ultimate goal in relationship to his creation, IS REDEMPTIVE.**
- **I'm talking about the concept we will wrestle with in a few weeks... excerpts verses 16-18**

*all things have been created through Christ and for Christ... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. **GODS GREAT PURPOSE AND WORK IS REDEMPTIVE!***

- **So... this gets practical really quick. Yesterday driving back from Denver, stopped for Gelato in Frisco. As pulling in, young woman walked by dressed in a rather extreme example of 'Goth'... before I thought about it, I rather sarcastically said (inside our van) "Nice outfit".**
- **Now, I wasn't consciously trying to be mean, but that reaction wasn't of the Spirit. No- even in a subtle way, I was diminishing her. Being judgmental. I was devaluing her. At a different time in my life my reaction may have included thinking- people like her are the problem. Look at that- she's probably immoral, an addict, maybe both, or worse.**
- **MAYBE she did have these issues- or others- but maybe she didn't. AND, there are plenty of people who dress and externally act like good conservative citizens who are dealing with immorality, addiction, and worse!**
- **In the midst of that thought, my daughter (who at times is also a voice of my conscience), said "Dad, did you have to say that?"**
- **NO, I didn't. As we sat there eating our gelato I thought about how that young woman was a precious, eternal soul and creation of God- and Gods desire for her, God's countenance to her, is REDEMPTIVE. This means that as a person given the wisdom and understanding of God (if I will listen), my countenance and posture toward her will be REDEMPTIVE!**

COMPASSIONATE. DESIRING that she would come to know the presence and life of her creator.

- **NOW- she walked down the sidewalk, we went in for gelato, and I'll never know her. BUT THERE ARE PLENTY of people in my life LIKE her that I DO know or have the opportunity to know. People very different from me, people whose stories I don't understand, for whom my first instinct used to be thinking "YOU are the problem... God's countenance toward you is punitive."**
- **So, over the past year I've walked through a few doors that just maybe the Spirit nudged me toward. I've purposefully developed a few friendships with people who are very different from me, people I've never associated with before.**
- **As part of this, a few months ago, I entered into one of these friends world- nothing heroic, trust me. I just showed up in a place and time where I wasn't expected, and was present. A friend.**
- **Recently, I had coffee with this person and they said "Ethan, you have no idea what it meant that you came to where I was- after you left I just cried..." FROM that conversation, that followed really just a simple act of kindness, a door is opening for a renewed conversation about Jesus.**
- **Encapsulate this- God is leading me deeper into the knowledge of His will, this is renewing my desire follow him, to be pleasing to him, which has led me to take actions I wouldn't have taken before- AND I'M EXPERIENCING GOD WORK IN ME... which is leading me deeper into scripture and a desire for wisdom and understanding of the knowledge of his will.**
- **Bringing this all the way to us, this is Paul's prayer- that we will grow in our knowledge of God, which will result in us increasingly living in a way that pleases God, which in turn will deepen our knowledge of God. IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER, THIS IS SOMETHING TO PRAY FOR!**
- **FROM HERE, on top of all this, Paul will pray that we will be STRENGTHENED with ALL the power of God's Glorious might.... but we are out of time, and we will delve into that incredible thought NEXT WEEK.**

LORD JESUS... We ask – lead us to continually pray- that God will fill us with the knowledge of his will in all the wisdom and understanding your Spirit gives... and as we grow in this way, looking to you, may our lives be worthy and please to God in every way- as a result, may we bear fruit in every good work you prepare for us, and through all of this, may we continue growing in our knowledge of God...