

An Old Prayer for a New Year

12.29.24

Introduction: Vision and Clarity for the next year.

A. Let's be honest:

1. Nobody has any idea what 2025 holds for us.
2. We lack specifics, but I do sense a direction.

B. That direction is an increased focus on prayer.

1. This church does lots of things well.
 - a. You give generously, and 2024 was the greatest giving year in this church's history.
 - b. You love preaching and teaching, and the harder the message the more you all seem to respond.
2. Two areas needing growth:
 - a. Worship.
 - b. Prayer
3. I'm not saying we don't worship and we don't pray.
 - a. But I feel these are two areas we could grow in.
 - b. Of the two, everything flows from prayer.

C. Where is this coming from?

1. 2024 was probably the hardest year of pastoral ministry I've had yet.
2. More marriages struggling, more wayward kids, more loss, more pain, more darkness.
3. It seems almost monthly I'm confronted by new spiritual strongholds and attacks of the enemy.

4. Strongholds don't respond to strategy; they respond to prayer.

D. In 2025, I want to see a more mature and victorious church.

I've never been much of a "verse or word for the year guy", but as I come into the beginning of a new year, what is speaking to me is

Colossians 1:28–29 (CSB)

²⁸ We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me.

I feel a sermon series from Colossians coming in the next year or two.

1. How do I and the church leadership present everyone mature in Christ?
2. What ways am I to "labor" and "strive"?

E. This morning, I want to share a my pastoral priority with you through the Apostle Paul's prayer for the Church in Colossae.

1. Pastors do lots of things, especially in a church this size.
2. I have no trouble staying busy, and I do struggle getting it all done.
3. But if I had to narrow our focus as a church for this year, I can't shake the feeling that Paul's pastoral prayer for the church in Colossae is speaking to us.

Colossians 1:9–14 (CSB)

⁹For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, ¹⁰so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the

domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.
¹⁴In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1. We haven't stopped praying for you.

A. Certain practices are absolutely foundational for a Christian.

1. We know this to be true.
2. All Christians are called to study Scripture and to pray.
3. It's easy to assume two things:
 - a. First, it's easy to assume that we all know this.
 - b. Second, it's easy to assume what is meant by studying Scripture and prayer.

B. The problem: I don't know what you don't know.

1. Colossians is a letter Paul wrote to a group of people he has never met.
 - a. Many of the churches Paul had helped start.
 - b. But not this one.
 - c. Kind of like his letter to the Romans, Paul didn't know for sure what the audience knew or didn't know.
2. One of my favorite leadership stories happened when legendary coach Vince Lombardi walked into Green Bay training camp in the summer of 1961, the year after they lost in the Super Bowl.

(Vince Lombardi) took nothing for granted. He began a tradition of starting from scratch, assuming that the players were blank slates who carried over no knowledge from the year before... He began with the most elemental

statement of all. "Gentlemen," he said, holding a pigskin in his right hand, "this is a football."¹

3. Another example is from Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden began the first practice of every preseason with a lesson in how to put on socks.

He carefully demonstrated the proper technique while the new freshmen on the team were watching and likely thinking, "Why is coach doing this? I've been putting on socks all my life..."

Wooden went on to explain that if the players aren't mindful in smoothing out the creases and wrinkles in the socks before they put their shoes on, they will be more prone to blisters as they begin training. And blisters will prevent them from practicing at their best.²

4. Are their religious blisters keeping you from following Jesus at your best?

C. Who taught you to pray?

1. Who taught you how to read Scripture intelligently and well?

2. For most of us, the answer is "no one."

3. We've heard lots of prayers.

a. Someone taught us to take off our hats and close our eyes.

b. We seem to have learned to only have one person pray at a time, out loud, although that is cultural not biblical.

c. Acts 4:24 shows all of the believers raising their voices together.

¹Lombardi, book by David Maraniss, <https://jamesclear.com/vince-lombardi-fundamentals>

² Wooden, <https://excellentjourney.net/2014/08/14/how-to-put-on-socks/>

4. As I read the Gospels, I find it humbling that the first followers of Jesus were Jewish men who had been taught how to pray since their youth.

a. Their fathers taught them the Shema, they memorized prayers, and prayed multiple times a day.

b. They grew up in a culture and religion of prayer.

c. Yet, they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

D. 2025 is a year we are paying more attention than ever before to prayer.

1. Prayer at church.

2. Prayer at home.

3. Silent prayer, out loud prayer.

4. Wouldn't it be great if we could agree with the Apostle Paul, who boldly proclaimed, "We have not ceased praying for you!"

E. We know to pray.

1. But what do we pray for?

2. What was Paul praying for?

Praying for what?

2. The Apostle Paul had a strategy for praying for the Colossians.

"We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,"

A. Our typical prayers are for help and healing.

1. They are also reactive and not proactive.

2. There isn't anything wrong with these sorts of prayers.

3. But they are not supposed to be the only prayers.

B. Paul and his team prayed for the believers to be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

1. Most of us want to walk in God's perfect will and plan for our lives.

a. We don't want to make any more mistakes.

b. We don't want to grieve the Spirit of God by our actions and behaviors.

c. There are some today hearing this message, and your prayer is, "Lord, I will follow. I just don't know where you are going."

2. I also couldn't share the impression in my preparation that there are those here who don't seek God's will because you aren't willing to walk in full obedience to what you are being asked to do.

a. The revealed will of God requires faithful obedience.

b. To walk in the light of revelation is more costly than walking in darkness and ambiguity.

c. Clarity brings accountability, and accountability holds both reward and discipline.

d. Some of us in the room will not be happy in the coming months if we start praying this way.

C. **Confusion is contagious.**

1. When we walk in confusion about God's Will and God's ways we spread that confusion.

2. We spread that confusion to our family.

3. We spread confusion to our organizations.

4. We spread confusion to our church.

D. But what could change if we started praying for ourselves and each other to "be filled with the knowledge" of God's will!

1. What if we cried out to God to be filled with all spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding?

2. We all need this.

3. Luke even says this about Jesus: Luke 2:52 (CSB)

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

E. My friends, I submit to you that we all need to grow up in our spiritual understanding.

1. We are making mistakes and missing opportunities because we lack spiritual understanding.

2. We read, but don't understand.

3. We pray, but aren't effective.

4. We worship, but don't connect.

5. We give, yet don't see the fruit.

6. Why?

7. Could it be because we have forgotten the fundamentals?

3. What are the results of this kind of praying?

⁹For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, ¹⁰so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light.

A. Notice the "so that" statements.

1. "SO" tells us the result, the purpose of the original action.

2. Be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, SO...

B. What is success? What is the purpose?

1. May walk in a manner worthy of the Lord

2. Fully pleasing to him.

3. May bear fruit in every good work

4. Increase in the knowledge of God

5. Strengthened with all power

C. The results of this kind of praying are:

1. God's people will walk like the Lord.

2. God's people will be FULLY PLEASING to Him.

a. That word "fully" hits hard.

b. Not just parts or portions of my life, but ALL OF IT.

c. Every thought, every action, every intention, everything.

d. I'm not there yet, but if you pray and I pray, and if we walk in obedience to the wisdom and knowledge God gives, it is possible.

3. God's people will bear fruit or results, in every good work.

a. The result of our actions will be good and God-honoring.

b. What people receive from me will benefit and bless them, not bring death and destruction.

4. God's people will increase in knowledge of the Lord.

a. This is an invitation to intimacy, not merely intellectual knowing.

b. You can know in your mind and still miss out.

5. God's people will be strengthened with all power, according to God's glorious might.

a. This kind of praying helps others move from their strength to God's.

b. God's call for you requires His empowerment to succeed.

1. If you are married, your best marriage is only possible with God's glorious might.

2. If you are raising kids, the best you can give your kids is a mom or dad who prays for them daily.

3. If you are called to work in public service, your best service is through being empowered by God.

c. God's calling always requires God's supply.

d. Without that supply, you cannot succeed.

e. But the good news is that God provides us with what we need, through prayer.

4. This kind of praying provides the intangibles we all need.

¹⁰so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light.

A. Part of our problem has to do with mindset (which is the next part of our Romans series).

1. If you walked into your house after church and flip the light switch you expect there to be power.

a. When there isn't, you look for the problem.

2. But if you walked into an Amish house, you would be terribly surprised if they were Netflixing and Chill.

B. The expectation upon entering the house is different.

1. When we come to God in prayer, do we have expectations of power?

2. What surprises you more when God shows up or when He seems to be silent?

3. When you pray, are you surprised when God answers?

4. When you ask for guidance, are you surprised when you get it or don't get it?

C. Part of the fundamentals of Christianity is the Expectation of God's power.

1. We should not be surprised when Mahomes throws the pass and it is caught by the receiver.

2. We expect the basketball to go through the hoop after leaving the hands of a professional like Caitlin Clark or Steph Curry.

3. We should not be surprised to hear that God's people are praying, and that those prayers are fervent and effectual.

D. When we are engaged in this type of praying, not only are we empowered to live for Jesus and to walk worthy of what He has done, we also receive three things we all need.

1. All endurance

2. All patience

3. All joy

E. How can we keep going?

1. By having people in your life praying for you to endure.

2. By having people in your life praying for you to have patience, which is a form of endurance.

- a. Patient endurance means that our heart is ready and receptive to God's working in us at any time.
- b. We can endure lots of things while grumbling, complaining, or numbing ourselves.
- c. Patient endurance is expectant, anticipating God's power and glory at any moment.
- d. And the willingness to wait until He shows up.

F. How can we keep going?

1. Through regular doses of God's joy.
2. You can't buy or fake joy, but you can receive it.
3. Perhaps you have prayed for joy.
4. But what if you started praying for others, by name, to receive the joy of the Lord!

Apply: What if 2025 was a year of decision?

A. If a handful of us started praying like Paul prayed for the Colossians, what would happen?

1. Some would experience victory and spiritual strength that we have never felt before.
2. Insight, wisdom, knowledge, power, growth, and maturity would become the expectation, not the accident.
3. What if we prayed for each other to be strengthened with every spiritual blessing?

B. Some of us in the room will not be happy.

1. When God starts showing us how we are NOT walking worthy of God's calling, we will have some choices to make.
2. The light of God's revelation exposes us as we really are.

3. When God starts giving us insight, knowledge, and wisdom, will we walk in obedience or rebellion?

4. Are you ready for the responsibility that goes with the opportunity?

C. Prayer is an amazing opportunity.

1. But with it comes responsibility.

2. But if you are like me and Julie, we feel the call to more prayer.

3. We feel the call to come boldly before the throne of God, not just for ourselves but for others.

Prayer Time

This morning, I want to invite as many who are willing to say yes to come before God this morning and ask:

“that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,”

Ask God to burden you with the desire to pray.

Ask God to wake you up in the middle of the night with a name and a prayer.

Ask God to give you wisdom, and knowledge, and spiritual insight.

Ask God to give our family and friends endurance, patience, and joyful thanksgiving.

Ask God and receive.