

Prayers for 2004 1-11-04

Over my vacation, I sought the Lord as to the direction He would have us go as a body. I had an idea before I left on vacation, but I had that leading really made clear during my time away. Last Summer I knew the Lord was showing me clearly to end my time of teaching at Cornerstone. I still intend to share at some of their chapel services, but I knew the Lord was showing me I was going to need to put more of my focus here at Wayside Chapel.

As I read through the letters of the Apostle Paul, one thing seemed to stand out in nearly every letter, prayers and prayer requests. Paul told the churches just what it was that he was praying for them and why. Then he asked for specific prayers from them for his ministry. I want to take this week to depart from our series through the Gospel of Matthew to share those prayers and prayer requests with you. I have already begun praying these things for each of you. The time that I once took in the mornings to go to teach, I'm planning on spending in front of our picture boards of attendees, praying for you. I believe it is going to be an essential part of our progress in this New Year.

I'll be ...asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Colossians 1:9 (NIV)

How many of you want to know God's will? That is a wonderful thing. That is the work of the Holy Spirit in you to even desire to know His will. Without the working of the Spirit, your only concern is how to go about accomplishing your own will. But there is often some conflict here when you find out what God's will is. We often say we want to know, but when it is revealed to us, we often back away, choosing a safer, more comfortable route.

During the next 40 days, we will be meeting in small groups each week. I really hope that everyone can be a part of one of those groups. We will have five or six at various times and multiple locations. During the week we will each read one chapter a day on our own from the book Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren. Rick takes one of the Scriptural reasons for our existence and expands on it in seven chapters of the book. Then, once a week, we will meet with our small group to learn from one another what we have been seeing about God's Divine purpose for our lives. We will be doing just what the Apostle Paul prayed in Colossians 1:9, *...asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*

What could be more important than finding out the reason for which you were created? The question is, once you find out, will you respond by becoming what you were meant to be? By God's grace we will encourage one another to accept God's will for our lives. That is a little frightening, because it may lead us in a whole new direction and change the focus of our life. But it is also exciting to think we will discover from God's word what we are created to do.

Imagine a trowel always thinking it was supposed to be a shovel. Then one day a mason comes along and sticks it in some cement. Suddenly the trowel finds

something it was designed to do. A writing pen will work as a back scratcher, but put it on paper to write out a poem and it is much more functional. God has designed you with a purpose. If you have felt like you haven't been doing what you were designed to do, you may be right.

I truly believe this is a turning point for this body of believers. Before we can add new believers and grow into all that God is calling this church to be, we need the unity that comes from having a similar vision and conviction as to what we are called to. You will discover from God's word some purposes that we all have in common, and some that are uniquely suited to the way God designed you.

Over the last 40 years there has been a paradigm shift in the way many see the church. Because of the success of a church in South Korea and several very large churches that have followed their example here in the USA, we have begun to see that individual growth and community occurs in small groups. The small group is the church. On Sundays, the churches gather to worship together in what we call a worship service. During the week the small groups meet to function like the body should function as described in the New Testament. All the descriptions of the early church that we read about bear little resemblance to our church services. How can you have a genuine family like concern for everyone when you meet with more than 100 people? The solution is the small group. Each small group gives everyone an opportunity to share, grow and function as the Lord designed them to. If someone is ill, or in need of prayer, it is the small group that they meet with weekly that has the close ties, familiarity, and concern for them.

Not everyone will meet in a small group, even though I think would be best for us all. For those that don't, we need to have the larger shepherding groups that Pastor Ed put in place. If you don't meet with a group, please join us in daily reading a chapter from Purpose Driven Life as a devotional thought, so that we can all go through the book together. On a daily basis I'll be *asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*

I'm wrestling in prayer for you...*that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.* Colossians 4:12 (NIV) Once you know God's will, I'll be praying that you stand firm in it. God's word and the Holy Spirit will direct you to it, but then you must rely on the strength of the Holy Spirit to stand firm in it. It is easy to be drawn off course by circumstances and desires. We all need to be reassured that we are where we were meant to be, doing what we were meant to do in the power of the Spirit. That is a mature believer. They find God's will, step into it, and stick to it, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Turn with me to Ephesians and read along. This is a dynamite passage! *I (will) keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.* Ephesians 1:17 (NIV) So much of what we need is simply the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know Jesus better. Knowing Him isn't just studying a biography. It is a personal acquaintance that grows through relationship. That requires that, in your daily life, the Spirit grants you the wisdom to see what God is up to in your life, how He is

graciously guiding and directing it. The Spirit of God must reveal Jesus to us. The Scriptures tell us that the whole earth is full of His glory. Do you see it? How are you to know Him better unless you begin to see His glory in your life, in the church, and in your daily circumstances?

The greater your revelation of Jesus, the greater your love for Him will be. You can't help but love Him more when your revelation of Him is more complete. It is only a misunderstanding of who He is that would cause any other response than love. Most of our spiritual growth comes simply from a greater revelation of Jesus. The people you see that love Him the most see Him more clearly, and therefore they love Him more dearly. I will be praying that God will give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know Him better.

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. Ephesians 1:18-19 (NIV) Paul is praying for two separate things here. First, he is asking that you get the spiritual vision to see how richly glorious His inheritance in us is. That is to say, that you might see how incredibly valuable your spiritual family is. We need the eyes of our heart enlightened. God is doing an incredible transformation in us all. He is making us into the image of His Son. Now, how would you like to be in a room with 50 people just like Jesus? You almost are. I say "almost" because we are all a work in progress. When you think of it that way, it completely changes the way you see your small group and your larger church family. I would love to hang out with a group of people that were anywhere near as wonderful as Jesus. Are your spiritual eyes starting to be enlightened? It doesn't come just because we try to think this way. We will always end up seeing the things that annoy us, the imperfections, and the things that are yet to be changed, but that is where we come to the second part of the prayer. There is a reason these two things are prayed together.

He prayed that your heart's eyes could also see the power that is at work in us. Your heart is more than your intellect. It is where your deepest convictions reside. The work going on in us is the power that raised Christ from the dead. It is the power that can change us to be like Jesus. If your heart sees the power that is at work, by faith you can see the finished product. If it is the power that took a cold lifeless body drained of blood and raised it to glory after three days, then certainly He can change those annoying things and weaknesses in our fellow family members and in us. He can teach that brother to speak with gentleness. He can cause that sister to be willing to open up and share her hurts. He can teach us all to forgive and refuse to be offended. He can teach us to truly love one another. So, I will be praying that the eyes of your heart become enlightened so that you see the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints and His incredibly great power toward us who believe.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:16-19 (NIV)

You say, "You don't have to pray that Christ may dwell in me. I'm already saved."

The Strong's definition of that word "dwell" includes to pervade, prompt and govern.

Yes, Christ is in you, but does He pervade your thoughts, words and deeds? Does

He prompt your thoughts, words and deeds? Does He govern them? Our inner

being needs to be strengthened with power through His Spirit. Without that

strengthening of His power, Christ may live in us, but will He be given the freedom to pervade, prompt and govern our lives?

He goes on to pray that we would be rooted and established in love. That is the fruit of Christ dwelling in our hearts. Love becomes the theme of our life, love for God and for our fellow man. Rooted and established in that love, Paul asks that we might grasp the dimensions of God's love. This is similar to the prayer for a revelation of Christ. To see Him more clearly is to see the dimensions of His love, a love that surpasses knowledge. You have to experience it. It isn't an intellectual attainment. It is a relationship. It's a heart issue. And as you do experience it, you will be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. What a statement! I can't say I understand that completely, but I can pray it for you and for me.

Here is one more prayer for you from the letter to the Philippians 1:9-11 *...that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.* (NIV) This has aspects of the other prayers, an increase in love with knowledge and depth of insight, but here is where we have a slight difference. "*That you may be able to discern what is best.*" Much of the time our difficulty is discerning between the good and the best. It is true for our church as a whole, but also for the individual purpose and effectiveness of your life individually. There are any number of good things, but there is only one thing that is best. The good is the enemy of the best. It would be good for me to teach this semester, but the Lord helped me discern it wasn't the best thing. The best is the thing that will really bear fruit and change those we minister to and us.

He prays that we might be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness... There are so many ways to get off track. The road is wide that leads to destruction. My prayer for you is that you will be kept pure and blameless. We have all seen some people we know go off track, seeking other things to satisfy their soul. Let us pray to be kept pure and blameless until our Lord's return. We won't be sinless, but we will be on track, not causing others to stumble, filled with the fruit of righteousness.

These are the things I need to pray for you. I can sum it up like this: I will pray that you are filled with the knowledge of His will, standing firm in the will of God. I'll pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know Him better, and that the eyes of your heart enlightened to know the riches in your spiritual family and the power at work in us. I'll pray that you are strengthened by the Spirit that Christ may dwell (pervade, prompt and govern) in you, and that you might know the dimensions of His love. I'll

pray that your love might increase, that you'll discern the best, and be kept pure and blameless till the Lord's return.

Here is what Paul asked them to pray for him, and so I ask that you would pray this for your leadership here. *And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.* Colossians 4:3-4 (NIV) Notice Paul says "us". He worked with a team. Pray that God would open a door for our message. We can preach and teach till we are blue in the face, but without God opening the doors to hearts, we won't get far. The pastors that meet together are desperate for God to do this. We really long to see a door opened for the message. Right now it seems there is an insurmountable barrier between those who attend church and those who will not. We need a door to be opened for the message.

Pray that we might proclaim it clearly as we should. We need to be so careful in our choice of words. We need to pick the right illustrations. The Gospel must be clearly presented. We need the Spirit's help for that.

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6:19-20 (NIV) Pray that we would not pull any punches, but say what the Spirit leads us to say. In Paul's day he could be tempted to water down the message of faith because of the persecution from the Jews. He could have backed away from declaring Christ is the only Lord for fear of the Romans. Today, we are sometimes tempted to lighten our message so as to not offend those who have one agenda or another. Pray that when it comes to the clear teachings of the word, we will be fearless and not men pleasers. Pray that God gives us the specific words to teach and preach. Pray that our concern will be for correctness according to truth, not political correctness.

Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2 And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 (NIV) Pray that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly. Many people in our city think they know what Christianity is about, when all they really know is religion. Jesus is a person, not a religion. Pray that the real message of His love for them spreads rapidly and is honored. That would take a miracle, but God does miracles when His people pray!

And pray that we who are out front would be delivered from wicked and evil men. If we are effective in preaching and living the Gospel, we will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12) Pray that God would deliver us from those who stand against us so that the work may continue. Pray for spiritual protection as well. Considering the history of pastors in this city, you know the enemy comes against them with anything that will hinder them. We need your prayers.

The summary of my prayer requests is on the front of your bulletin. Pray for us that: There will be an open door for our message,
That we proclaim the gospel clearly,

That words may be given us,
That we proclaim it fearlessly,
That the message spread rapidly and be honored and
That we have spiritual and physical protection.

Thank you for praying those prayers. You can also pray the prayers I'm praying for you for yourself and for your family. Would you take my prayer requests home and pray these things for your leaders at Wayside? Let's see what the Lord will do when we pray like these things for one another.