

#1 Prayer for Dummies
Series: Seeing the Invisible
Colossians 1:1-14

INTRO: Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt as though something was missing? Life had lost its:

Purpose...Meaning...Enthusiasm...Direction

It may not have been so much that things were going wrong in your life ... it just seemed something wasn't quite right. Life had left you with a nagging, persistent, empty, hollow feeling on the inside.

Today, I want to take you to a book of the Bible that can give us the answer to what is missing in our lives.

I am beginning a sermon series called **SEEING THE INVISIBLE**, as we look at a letter that Paul wrote to a church he had never seen called 'Colossians.' I would love to see Hollywood make a true-to-life movie about Jesus and base it on this book. It would be a blockbuster! We could call it 'Guardian of the Galaxy,' not 'Guardians of the Galaxy.'

It would keep you on the edge of your seat, because there is only one human being who has ever lived, that is a part of the life of every person that will ever live. He affects our life every single day and we don't even realize it.

When a person dies their impact on the world immediately begins to fade into the background and they are quickly forgotten. Even if they leave something that we experience or enjoy every day we don't really think about the person who did it.

For example, if you have an iPhone or a Mac, or an Apple product, how often do you think about Steve Jobs? When you turn on a light in your room or a radio, you probably don't think about Thomas Edison at all.

There was one man that bucked this trend. His name is Jesus. His impact was greater a hundred years after he died than it was when he was alive. It was even

greater five hundred years later. One-thousand years later, and even after two-thousand years, He has more followers in more places around the world than ever before. Four mini biographies about his life and teaching called 'the gospels' have impacted the world so much they have been translated into 2500 languages. To put that in perspective, the second-most- translated book, The Little Prince, has been translated into only about six hundred languages.

His name will be spoken by more people all over the world than every other human name of any other person alive or dead combined. Jesus even changed the way we think about history.

So, even after two millennia, every time anybody anywhere opens a calendar or a newspaper, boots up a computer, or even gets on the internet, we are reminded that Jesus Christ is indeed the focus point of human history. From when Jesus Christ was born, until now, every ruler, king, dictator and president must be dated in reference to the life of Jesus. Time is measured by two words AD (Anno Domini) Latin '***in the year of our Lord,***' referring to years after the birth of Jesus Christ.

British author H.G. Wells once wrote, '*I am a historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all of history.*'

This book called 'Colossians' says that He is the creator and controller of the universe. The whole book can be summed up in one half of one verse in Colossians 3:11, ...***Christ is all, and is in all.***

The central theme of Colossians is 'How to Live Life to Its Fullest.'

Col. 2:9 - 10 ***"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form," (10)"and you have been given the fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."***

Two obvious truths are taught here:

1. In Christ dwells the completeness, fullness of God. He is fully God.
2. In Christ we find completeness, fullness.

Outside of Christ it is impossible to live life to its fullness. Only in Christ do we find fullness of life!

Turn with me to Colossians 1:1-14

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— 5 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 6 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. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

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, 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, 12 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. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. [NIV]

Let's Pray

Let me give you a brief background to this letter. There was a heresy that threatened the Colossian church and continues to threaten the church of our day. I want to call it '**The Something More' Heresy.**

Simply put, the "Something more" heresy says, "Sure you need Christ, that is

wonderful and good ... but He is not enough. You need something more.' Now this church started out like this.

- A. Spiritually they were "in Christ."
- B. Morally they were "holy."
- C. Intellectually they were "believing."
- D. Sociologically they were "brothers."
- E. Geographically they were "in Colosse."

But some were introducing a form of "gnosticism." Gnosticism comes from the Greek word, gnosis (know - sis) - a term which means "to know" The agnostics were people who proudly claimed to be "in the know" about God. They were claiming to be spiritual elitists who had discovered "something more" than Christ.

*Christ plus philosophy (Col. 2:8 - 10)

*Christ plus legalism/ritual (Col. 2:11 - 17)

Illustration: A preacher walking down a country lane saw a young farmer struggling with a load of hay that had fallen off his cart. The boy was all hot and sweaty and looked very upset. "You look hot," said the preacher. "Why don't you just rest for a moment, and then I'll give you a hand." "No thanks," said the young man. "My father wouldn't like it." "Don't be silly," the minister said. "Everyone is entitled to a break. Come and have a drink of water." Again, the young man refused saying his father would be upset. Losing his patience, the preacher said, "Your father must be a real slave driver. Tell me where I can find him." "Well," replied the young man, "he's under the load of hay."

That boy knew what he had to do. There was a sense of urgency and to his actions. He was driven and intent and no one could sway him from his goal. But that didn't stop somebody from trying. That preacher had a faulty understanding of what was going on.

That is why Paul writes, in Col. 2:8, ***"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."***

You will never experience anyone or anything that surpasses what you already possess in Jesus Christ. Colossians tells us that Jesus is:

- *The image of the invisible God (1:15)
- *The firstborn over all creation (1:15)
- *The creator of all things (1:16)
- *The first one in priority and position (1:17)
- *The head of the church (1:17)
- *The firstborn from the dead (1:18)
- *The preeminent One (1:18)
- *The fullness of God (1:19)
- *The reconciler of mankind (1:20)
- *The hope of glory (2:27)
- *The One in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3)

When you have Christ - you have it all
 When you have Christ - you have more than you can comprehend
 When you have Christ - you are complete
 When you have Christ - you are fulfilled
 When you have Christ - you need nothing more!

There is so much I could say about the intro to this letter. For instance, Paul greets them by saying, ***'Grace and peace to you from God our Father.'***

The early church often greeted each other with a pronounced blessing of 'grace and peace.' It was a blessing of fulfillment and contentment.

Notice grace always precedes peace.

Rom. 1:7b Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Cor. 1:3 Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Cor. 1:2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gal. 1:3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph. 1:2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Phil. 1:2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The sequence is always the same. Grace always precedes peace, because without grace - there is no peace. "Grace" points us to the basis of our new life in Christ. Outside of Christ there is no peace.

Transition: What I want to focus on this morning is the prayer that Paul prayed for people that he had never seen. It is one of the greatest prayers ever prayed, and it is a perfect model on how you and I can pray for people we don't even know. Let's call it '**A Prayer for Dummies.**'

Someone came up with the idea of writing books on certain subjects for dummies. There are five hundred titles that have been published and have sold over 200 million copies. These are just a few of actual books for dummies you can buy. Have a skin problem? There is Acne for Dummies. If you want to know how to start up a relationship with someone you are attracted to there is Flirting for Dummies. If it leads anywhere, you can then read Dating for Dummies. If it doesn't work out, you can read Divorce for Dummies.

You get the picture. This is a prayer you can pray for anybody, anytime, under any circumstances, for family members, (kids and grandkids) and employees. I would ask you to pray for me and it is a prayer we need to pray for our church.

I. Be Directed by the Will of God

There is one thing you can say about Paul as you study his writings. This man knew how to pray. This man knew how to take his prayer life to a totally different level. Remember, he is praying about a church he has never visited and for people he has never seen. He doesn't have to wonder what to pray for them or how to pray for them.

'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.' (Colossians 1:9, NIV)

This prayer is sequential. It is not coincidental that the first request Paul makes is that we all be filled with the knowledge of the will of God. That is, if you are living in the will of God every other part of your Christian life will fall into place.

Understand what Paul meant here. There are two words you need to hear. One is the word **'filled'** and the other is the word **'knowledge.'**

To be 'filled' means to be **'controlled by.'** If you are filled with alcohol, you will be controlled by alcohol. If you are filled with anger, you will be controlled by anger. Later, Paul talks about being filled with the Holy Spirit. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit you are controlled by the Holy Spirit. So, what Paul is saying is, **'We should be controlled by the will of God.'**

The other word, **'knowledge,'** does not refer to intellectual knowledge of the head, but a spiritual, personal experiential knowledge in the heart.

Too often, when we talk about the will of God we are thinking in terms of our future. What do I need to do tomorrow? Should I take this job or not? Should I go to this college or that college? There is nothing wrong with that because there are many ways in which the Lord leads us. **What the Bible primarily means about the will of God is not trying to figure out something you need to learn; it is obeying what you already know.**

Listen to this one statement, **'Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.'** (Psalm 143:10, NIV)

The psalmist doesn't say, 'Teach me to learn your will, but to teach me to do your will.' There is an assumption here that you already know what the will of God is and if you are a follower of Jesus, you should know it.

You may say, 'Where do I find it?' In the bible. Most of the God's will for your life has already been revealed. I don't have time to quote scripture and verse, but we are told repeatedly in the Bible, it is the will of God that we be sexually pure. It is the will of God that we be grateful. It is the will of God that we love others. It is the will of God that we should be saved.

The reason why many people never find the will of God they DON'T know, is

because they are not already obeying the will of God they DO know.

That is why Paul goes on to say, *‘...the knowledge of his will comes through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.’* (Colossians 1:9, NIV)

This is how it works. **The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and gives you the wisdom of God to know and do the will of God.**

In his classic book, Confessions, Augustine tells of the turning point in his own life. He was struggling between the temptation of a mistress and the call of the Spirit of God on his life. He was leaning on a bench under a fig tree with his Bible open and he heard a voice calling from a neighboring house, ‘Pick it up...Pick it up...’

Interestingly, the person was not talking to Augustine, but some children who were playing a game. The voice stirred Augustine and he did what he heard. He picked up his Bible and he read it. Here is what he read, ***‘Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.’*** (Romans 13:13-14, NIV)

He heard the word of God, received the wisdom of God, to do the will of God.

II. Be Devoted to Your Walk with God

What is the purpose of being directed by the will of God? What is God’s endgame? ***‘...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.’*** (Colossians 1:10, NIV)

Now the phrase, ***‘live a life,’*** is the Greek word for ***‘walking.’*** Frequently in scripture, living for God was described as a walk. If you think about it, that is the way you live your life. Every day you take certain steps to go in certain directions and do certain things. It is the will of God that every step you take would be worthy of the Lord and would please him in every way.

When you are trying to make a decision about whether you ought to take a certain action or not, say a certain word or not, move to a different place or not,

here are a couple of great questions to ask:

Is what I am about to do, say or think worthy of the Lord?

Is what I am about to do, say or think pleasing to the Lord?

I really believe the reason Paul was praying that for the church in that day is the same reason we ought to be praying that for churches today.

Research shows that people who call themselves 'Christians' fall into two categories. There are those who see their Christian faith as background noise and then there are those who are actively living a Christlike life. There are people who say their Christian faith is very important in their lives.

Then you have what is called 'Nominal Christians.' They are the largest faith group in America today. Three-out-of-four adults have some Christian background, but about three-in-five American Christians are completely and mostly inactive in their faith.

The Barna Research Group have found that born-again Christians fail to display much evidence either in their actions or their attitudes of transformed lives. They found that most of the lifestyle of born-again Christians were statistically equivalent to those of non-believers.

On the one hand it is no wonder that one of the biggest criticisms that non-Christians have of Christians is hypocrisy. We face the same decision when we walk out the door of our homes that everybody else must make. What steps am I going to take? What path am I going to follow? Which direction am I going to go? Which action am I going to take?

There is so much more I could say but let me just say this loudly and clearly. Jesus died for us, so that we would live for him. We witness to this world in two ways: in our words and in our walk, and we need to make sure they both match to be both worthy of God and pleasing to him.

III. Be Diligent in Your Work for God

**If you are directed by the will of God, you will be devoted in your walk with God.
If you are devoted in your walk with God, you will be diligent in your work for**

God.

He goes on to say in verse 10, ‘...**bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.**’ (Colossians 1:10, NIV)

Would you like to know right now if you really are living in the will of God? If you really are right in your walk with God? Let me ask you one question and then you answer the question yourself. ‘Where is your fruit?’ Jesus famously said, ‘By their fruit you will know them.’

I have conducted the funerals of several people who said they were believers and they did come to church and they lived good moral lives, but other than that I never saw any fruit in their life. I never saw them serve in any place in the church or outside the church. I never knew them to ever share their faith in Christ.

Let me tell you why bearing fruit is so important. Because, bearing fruit leads to, ‘**growing in the knowledge of God...**’ (Colossians 1:10, NIV)

A lot of people read the Bible for the wrong reason. Every believer should read their Bible, and I am glad for every believer that does. **The primary reason we should be reading the Bible is not to increase in our knowledge about God, but in our knowledge of God.**

The question is not ‘How much do I know about God?’ but ‘How well do I know God?’ **If you really want to show people you know God don’t tell them how much of the Bible you know; show them how much of the Bible you live.**

The better you know God, the more you will love God. The more you love God, the more you want to serve God, please God, and obey God.

Here is what happens when you are directed by the will of God, devoted in your walk with God, and are diligent in your work for 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.’ (Colossians 1:11-12, NIV)

You will be tough. You will have great endurance. That refers to handling the difficult problems in your life. You will be tender. You have patience. You will be able to deal with difficult people, and you will be thankful, and content. The reason we can do that is because the guardian of the galaxy has rescued us, redeemed us and reclaimed us for his own.

If you want God to hear you when you pray you must obey him when He speaks.

If you will be directed by the will of God, and devoted in your walk with God, and diligent in your work for God, then not only will God hear you when you pray, but you will be a part of the answer.