

The Book of Colossians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: Prayer for Spiritual Growth

Colossians 1:9–14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This passage is one of the great prayers of the New Testament, and it carries real doctrinal weight, especially at its climax. Paul prays for spiritual maturity (knowledge of God's will that produces a worthy walk), and then he grounds the whole prayer in a sweeping statement about salvation: the Father has rescued us out of the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. The doctrinal task this week is twofold. First, help students see that genuine spiritual knowledge is never mere information; it always issues in changed living. Second, and most important, help them see that the kingdom of God is a present reality. We have already been transferred into it. Christ reigns now from the right hand of the Father. This passage stands directly against any teaching that pushes the kingdom off into a future earthly political reign, as if Christ were not yet king.

The formational aim flows naturally from the prayer itself. Paul models how to long for the right things, for ourselves and for those we love. Most of us pray defensively, asking God to remove discomfort. Paul prays offensively, asking God to grow the soul, to strengthen for endurance, to produce patience and even joy under pressure. If students leave this lesson praying differently, aiming higher in their requests for themselves and others, the lesson has formed them.

So aim at both. Send students home certain that they already live under the reign of Christ, redeemed and forgiven, citizens of a kingdom that is here and not merely coming. And send them home praying like Paul, hungry to grow rather than merely to be relieved, and full of thanks for the rescue God has already accomplished.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul prays that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (v. 9). What kind of knowing is this? How is the knowledge of God's will that Paul has in mind different from simply collecting religious information?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul prays that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Help students feel the fullness of that language: filled, all, wisdom, understanding. Paul is not praying for a few extra facts but for a deep, saturating grasp of what God wants.

Distinguish this knowing from mere information. The false teachers at Colossae prided themselves on special, hidden knowledge. Paul prays instead for the kind of knowledge that is moral and practical, knowledge of God's will, the sort of knowing that grips the conscience and steers the feet. A person can memorize a great deal of Scripture and still not know God's will in this sense.

Point out that this knowledge is paired with wisdom and understanding, which are about applying truth rightly in real situations. Many believers know what is right in the abstract but lack the wisdom to apply it in the messy particulars of a marriage, a workplace, or a hard decision. Paul prays for both the content and the skill to live it.

Stress that this is something God gives in answer to prayer. We grow in this knowledge by asking for it, by immersing ourselves in the word, and by obeying what we already understand. It is not reserved for scholars; it is promised to praying disciples.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The knowledge of God's will as moral and practical, not merely informational
- Wisdom and understanding as the skill of applying truth in real situations
- The contrast with the false teachers' boasted secret knowledge
- Spiritual knowledge as a gift God gives in answer to prayer and through the word

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between knowing a lot about the Bible and knowing God's will?
- Why does Paul pair knowledge with wisdom and understanding?
- How do we actually grow in this kind of knowing?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul ties knowing God's will directly to how we live: knowledge that leads to a walk worthy of the Lord (vv. 9–10). Where in your life have you known God's will clearly and yet not been living it out? What would it cost you to close that gap this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses on the gap most of us carry between what we know and what we do. Paul deliberately ties knowledge to walk: he prays for knowledge of God's will so that they will walk worthy. Knowledge that does not change the walk is not the knowledge Paul is after.

Help students locate one specific gap rather than wallowing in general guilt. Most of us already know God's will in some area we are not yet living, whether it is a relationship we need to

mend, a habit we keep excusing, or a generosity we keep postponing. The Spirit usually presses on something specific.

Then talk honestly about cost. Closing the gap between knowing and doing almost always costs something: pride, comfort, money, time, the approval of others. Paul's prayer assumes that a worthy walk is demanding. Encourage students to name the cost plainly and to take one concrete step this week rather than waiting to feel ready.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between knowing God's will and living it
- Knowledge meant to produce a worthy walk, not merely to inform
- Identifying one specific area rather than drowning in general guilt
- Counting the cost of obedience honestly

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you already know God's will but have not yet obeyed it?
- What is the cost of closing that gap, and what makes it hard?
- What is one concrete step you could take this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul prays that they would walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (v. 10). Notice the loop: we grow in knowledge in order to obey, and obeying leads to still more knowledge of God. How have you seen that pattern at work, where obedience deepens our knowledge of God rather than the other way around?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 10 contains a beautiful loop that is easy to miss. Paul prays they would walk worthy and bear fruit in every good work, and as they do, they will increase in the knowledge of God. We tend to assume the order runs only one way: learn first, then obey. Paul shows the circle is complete. Obedience itself deepens our knowledge of God.

Explain why this is so. There are things about God that can only be known by walking with Him through obedience. You cannot learn His faithfulness in trial from a book; you learn it by trusting Him in the trial and watching Him keep you. You cannot learn the joy of generosity by reading about it; you learn it by giving. Obedience is a doorway into deeper knowledge.

This protects students from a common trap: thinking they must understand everything before they obey anything. Often God reveals the next thing only after we have done the last thing. Encourage them to obey the light they have and trust God for more.

Tie it to fruitfulness. The fruit Paul prays for is in every good work, a whole life turned outward in service. As students give themselves to good works, they will find they are coming to know God in ways no amount of study alone could give them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reciprocal loop: knowledge leads to obedience, and obedience deepens knowledge
- Truths about God learned only by walking with Him in obedience
- The error of waiting to understand everything before obeying anything
- Fruitfulness in every good work as a path into deeper knowledge of God

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you learned something about God only by obeying Him through it?
- Why do we so often wait to feel sure before we obey?
- What good work might God use to deepen your knowledge of Him this season?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul prays for a walk that is fully pleasing to the Lord. Be specific: in what relationship or responsibility this week is the Lord asking you to live in a way that pleases Him rather than the people around you, or rather than yourself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul prays for a walk that is fully pleasing to the Lord. The phrase invites a searching question: whom are we actually trying to please? Much of our behavior is shaped less by a desire to please God and more by a desire to please others, or simply ourselves.

Help students get specific. Pleasing the Lord rather than people often comes to a head in a particular relationship or responsibility: a workplace where honesty costs something, a friendship where going along is easier than standing firm, a family pattern that is comfortable but not Christlike. The aim is to name one such arena.

Be careful to keep this from becoming joyless people-against-God moralism. Pleasing the Lord is the path to real freedom and joy, not a grim duty. The person who lives to please God is finally free from the exhausting tyranny of managing everyone else's opinion. Frame obedience as liberation, not burden.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living to please the Lord rather than people or self
- Identifying the specific arena where this tension is sharpest
- Pleasing God as freedom from the tyranny of others' opinions

- Obedience framed as liberation and joy, not grim duty

Discussion Prompts

- Whose approval most shapes your daily decisions right now?
- In what relationship is the Lord asking you to please Him rather than people?
- How is living to please God actually freeing rather than burdensome?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul prays that they would be strengthened with all power, according to God's glorious might, for endurance and patience with joy (v. 11). It is striking that he asks for great power, not so they can escape hardship, but so they can endure it with joy. What does this teach us about how God's power usually shows up in a Christian's life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 11 contains a surprise. Paul prays that they would be strengthened with all power, according to God's glorious might, and we lean in expecting some great feat to follow. Instead the goal is endurance and patience with joy. All the power of God, channeled into the quiet strength to keep going.

Help students adjust their expectations of how God's power shows up. We often imagine divine power as the removal of difficulty or a dramatic display. Far more often it appears as the inner strength to endure what has not been removed, to stay faithful in a long trial, to remain patient with difficult people, and to do it without bitterness.

Note the phrase with joy. Endurance alone can be grim; the world admires the stoic who grits his teeth. Paul prays for something deeper, an endurance shot through with joy, which is only possible when the heart is anchored in the hope and the kingdom he is about to describe.

Stress the source. This strength is according to His glorious might, not according to our reserves. The believer who runs dry has not run out of God. Encourage students to ask for this specific kind of strength, the strength to endure well, rather than only asking for escape.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's power displayed most often as strength to endure, not as escape from difficulty
- Endurance and patience as the goal of great divine power
- Joy as the mark of Christian endurance, not mere stoic grit
- Strength drawn from God's might, not from our own reserves

Discussion Prompts

- How is Christian endurance different from gritting your teeth and bearing it?
- Why might God strengthen us to endure a hardship rather than remove it?
- Where do you need to ask God for endurance with joy right now?

Question 6

Student Question:

Think of a trial you are carrying right now. Honestly, are you asking God mostly to remove it, or also to strengthen you to endure it well? What would endurance with patience and even joy look like in that specific situation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the previous truth inward and asks for honesty about our prayers. Most of us, in a trial, pray almost entirely for removal: take this away, change this circumstance, fix this person. That is not wrong; even Jesus prayed for the cup to pass. But it is incomplete.

Help students add the second prayer alongside the first: not only Lord, change this, but also Lord, change me through this, strengthen me to endure it well. This second prayer is one God delights to answer, and it is often the one that does the deeper work.

Invite students to picture endurance with joy in their specific situation. What would it look like, concretely, to walk through this trial with patience instead of resentment, with hope instead of despair? Naming it makes it possible to aim at it. Be sensitive to anyone in a raw, fresh grief; the call is not to manufacture cheerfulness but to lean on God's strength.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between praying only for removal and praying also for endurance
- Lord, change me through this as a prayer God delights to answer
- Picturing concretely what faithful endurance would look like in a real trial
- Sensitivity to fresh grief; joy is not forced cheerfulness

Discussion Prompts

- In your current trial, are you praying mostly for escape or also for strength?
- What would patient, joyful endurance actually look like in your situation?
- How can this group support someone whose trial is too fresh to feel any joy yet?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says the Father has qualified the saints to share in the inheritance (v. 12), and he frames the whole thing in thanksgiving. What does it mean that God Himself has qualified us, and why is gratitude the fitting response rather than pride in our own progress?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 12 turns to thanksgiving: giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. The key word is qualified. We did not qualify ourselves. We had no standing to claim a share in the inheritance; God Himself made us fit for it.

This guards against two errors. On one side is pride, the quiet assumption that our spiritual progress is our own achievement. On the other is despair, the fear that we could never be good enough to belong. Both are answered by the same word: God qualified us. The inheritance is a gift granted by grace, not a wage earned by merit.

Note that we are qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. The light language contrasts with the domain of darkness in the next verse. We have been brought out of darkness and given a place among God's holy people in the light. Gratitude is the only fitting response to a standing we could never have secured for ourselves.

Encourage students that this is a present, settled reality, not a distant hope they must anxiously work toward. The Father has already qualified them. That assurance frees the heart to serve out of gratitude rather than fear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God, not ourselves, as the one who qualifies us for the inheritance
- The inheritance as a gift of grace, not a wage earned
- Gratitude as the antidote to both pride and despair
- Our share among the saints in light as a present, settled standing

Discussion Prompts

- What changes when we realize God qualified us rather than us qualifying ourselves?
- How does this truth answer both pride and despair?
- Why is thanksgiving the right response to being qualified for the inheritance?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul's prayer overflows with thanksgiving even while these believers are under pressure. What would it look like for you to build deliberate, specific thanksgiving into your week, especially in a season that does not naturally feel thankful?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question presses on the practice of thanksgiving. Paul's prayer overflows with thanks even though the Colossians are under pressure from false teaching. Gratitude, for Paul, is not a reaction to good circumstances; it is a discipline rooted in what God has done.

Many believers wait to feel thankful and therefore rarely are. Help students see thanksgiving as something we do on purpose, naming specific mercies out loud, especially in hard seasons. Vague gratitude (thanks for everything) does little; specific gratitude (thanks for this person, this answered prayer, this rescue) reshapes the heart.

Offer practical handles: a daily habit of naming three specific things, thanksgiving woven into prayer before requests, returning to the great gifts of this very passage (qualified, rescued, transferred, redeemed, forgiven). Encourage students to choose one concrete practice for the week, especially if their current season does not naturally feel thankful.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Thanksgiving as a deliberate discipline, not merely a reaction to good circumstances
- Specific gratitude as more transforming than vague gratitude
- Practicing thanks especially in hard seasons
- Returning to the settled gifts of the gospel as fuel for gratitude

Discussion Prompts

- Do you wait to feel thankful, or do you give thanks on purpose?
- What is one specific mercy you can name and thank God for today?
- What simple practice could build thanksgiving into your week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul says the Father has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (vv. 13–14). What does this teach about the kingdom of God: when it began, who reigns in it, and where we stand in relation to it right now? And what does it mean that our redemption is defined as the forgiveness of sins?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, and it should be handled clearly and confidently. Paul says the Father has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (vv. 13–14). Two great truths stand here: the present reality of the kingdom, and the meaning of redemption.

Take the kingdom first. Paul speaks of the transfer in the past tense: God has already delivered, has already transferred. The Colossians are not waiting for the kingdom; they are already in it. This is the consistent teaching of the New Testament. Jesus announced that the kingdom was at hand (Mark 1:14–15), promised that some standing there would see it come with power (Mark 9:1), and the church began on Pentecost with that power poured out (Acts 2). Daniel foretold a kingdom God would set up in the days of those kings, a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44). That kingdom is the reign of Christ, established in His church, with Christ now seated at the right hand of God.

This stands squarely against premillennialism, which postpones the kingdom to a future earthly thousand-year political reign. Help students see plainly: Paul does not say we will be transferred into the kingdom when Jesus returns to set up an earthly throne. He says we have been transferred into it already. Christ is not a king-in-waiting; He reigns now, and His subjects are the redeemed who have been brought under His gracious rule. We do not look forward to the kingdom's beginning; we live in it and look forward to its consummation, when the King returns and delivers it up to the Father.

Now take redemption. Paul defines it precisely: in the beloved Son we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Redemption is a word from the slave market and the ransom: a price paid to set a captive free. Notice that Paul immediately equates it with forgiveness. Our deepest bondage was not political or economic but the guilt and power of sin, and the rescue we needed most was forgiveness, purchased by the blood of Christ.

Bring the two together. We have been moved from one realm to another, out from under the dominion of darkness and into the reign of the Son, and the doorway of that transfer is the forgiveness of sins. This is the same gospel proclaimed in Acts: those who heard, believed, repented, and were baptized into Christ received the forgiveness of sins and were added by the Lord to His people (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). The transfer is real, accomplished, and entered through the obedience of faith. Christians live now as citizens of the kingdom of the beloved Son.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom of God as a present reality: believers have already been transferred into it
- Christ reigning now from the right hand of God, not a king merely waiting to reign
- The fulfillment of Daniel 2:44 and Mark 1:14–15; 9:1 in the church begun at Pentecost (Acts 2)
- A clear answer to premillennialism: no future earthly thousand-year political reign to wait for
- Redemption defined as the forgiveness of sins, purchased by the blood of Christ
- The transfer entered through the obedience of faith (hearing, believing, repenting, being baptized into Christ)
- Deliverance from the domain of darkness as a real change of rule, not merely a change of feeling

Discussion Prompts

- What does the past tense (has delivered, has transferred) tell us about when the kingdom began?
- How would you lovingly answer someone who says the kingdom is still entirely future?
- Why does Paul define our redemption specifically as the forgiveness of sins?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Paul's prayer. He asks for knowledge that changes how we walk, strength to endure with joy, and a heart full of thanks for our rescue into the kingdom of the Son. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Colossians 1:9–14 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers up the whole prayer. Paul has asked for knowledge that reshapes the walk, strength to endure with joy, and a heart full of thanks for our rescue into the kingdom of the Son. Resist a tidy summary; press for one concrete truth to carry into the week.

Walk back through the prayer as a prompt. Some students most need the call to know God's will and finally obey it. Some need the promise of strength to endure a trial with joy. Some need to rest in the staggering fact that they have already been transferred into the kingdom and forgiven. Let them name the one that meets them.

Close by reminding students that the goal is formation, not information. Paul prayed this prayer so that the Colossians would actually become different people, more rooted, more thankful, more like their King. Invite them to let one truth from this passage do that work in them this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at transformation, not merely information
- Carrying one concrete truth into the week
- Resting in the accomplished rescue as the ground of obedience
- The Christian life as ongoing formation into the likeness of Christ the King

Discussion Prompts

- Which single truth from this prayer does your heart most need this week, and why?
- What would it look like, concretely, to live in light of that truth?
- How can this group pray Paul's kind of prayer for you in the days ahead?