

Watching and Praying for the Main Thing

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[0 : 0 0] at the cross. I'm anticipating next week being able to pick back up in Genesis where we will be next Sunday God willing in chapter 2 which is not a new telling of God's creative activity in chapter 1.

It's a kind of a detailed formatting filling in some of the facts from what he did in chapter 1 but today I want to say some things to us in keeping with what we are trying to cultivate here at Grace in the way of a church culture.

We're 5 years old and the Lord is a church family. God is doing a wonderful and beautiful work among us and that's not new. He was doing that when we constituted as Grace Church Williamsburg.

We went through lean times as we started. That's another story. But God was faithful as he always is and now we come to where we are today and I want to bring this message to you.

This is something that the folks who've been here at Grace these five years they've heard this message from me before a little over four years ago. I went back and reworked this and tweaked some things about it because I want you to have this in your heart as we move into Genesis 2.

[1 : 2 5] So we're in Colossians. The book of Colossians. And it's chapter one is where we'll start and I want to share with you the title of my message here is watching and praying for the main thing.

I want to talk to you about the main thing. Watching and praying for the main thing and this is a sermon as I hope most or if not all of my sermons are is about the glory of Christ living in you and how you are called together as God's people to glorify the Lord as we learn sound doctrine as we sit under the word of God and learn what it means for us to love Jesus well by giving ourselves to the truth the absolute truths of Scripture that give us the firm foundation to stand on as we come to know who God is by how he's revealed himself in Scripture.

So watching and praying for the main thing. Let's read the text that I'll be in for this morning. I'm actually going to pick it up in verse three and then I'll show you later what we're going to zero in on.

Verse three of Colossians chapter one. Paul says we give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ praying always for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints.

because of the hope laid up for you in heaven of which you previously heard in the word of truth the gospel which has come to you just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and multiplying just as it has been in you also since the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow slave who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf who also informed us of your love in the spirit and so he comes to verse nine for this reason also since the day we heard we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the full knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord to please him in all respects bearing fruit in every good work and multiplying in the full knowledge of God being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience joyously giving thanks to the father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light who rescued us from the authority of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the son of his love in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins that's an amen isn't it amen that'll preach and so I'm going to give it a shot above all things that I think we can do to serve each other as God's people in our immediate families that we live within as Christians but also in this body of believers that we call

[5 : 02] Grace Church Williamsburg I want to put before you this morning the priority of praying for each other now I'm going to go ahead and tell you praying is not the main thing praying is a means toward the main thing but praying is critical and I'm going to explain why I've chosen this passage for this morning as we move through the message let's ask and answer two primary questions from the example that Paul is giving us here in the way that he's going about praying for these people in every New Testament letter that Paul wrote he includes the content of his prayers for his readers he wants these people to know what he's praying for them I'll make that point several times as we move through so what are these two primary questions we need to keep in mind the first is this what are we to look and listen for in the lives of other believers and number two what are we to pray for on behalf of our fellow

Christians that's what I want you to keep in mind if you would beloved as we move through this passage do we even know how to do that by the end of the message I hope that we'll be a lot clearer what does it mean for us to look and listen for the for spiritual issues in the lives of other believers and what are we to pray for on behalf of them as we gain that information from their lives from the conversations we have with them so I'll give you several of these points that come from just a couple of verses within what I just read the context of what I just read and the first one I want to share with you concerns prompts I'll explain that it's from Colossians 1 9 if you'll look at that verse with me again for this reason also since the day we heard of it now in the new American standard translation it has that in the legacy standard Bible that I'm reading from this morning for this reason also since the day we heard but it is implied in what the new

American standard is translating for this well what reason what it that's what we're dealing with now Paul wants his readers to know the reasons and the content of his prayers for them so he's telling them this is what I'm praying for you and this is how I'm going about praying for you why does he want them to know that and what has Paul heard ask questions of the text be an investigator what has Paul heard about these believers that has served to prompt him both to praise God and then to pray for them to offer petition on their behalf what has he heard well we find the answer in the previous verses of verses 9 and 10 what's he talking about prior to so go back up into verse 4 with me he's already told us in verse 3 he's giving God thanks he's praying always always for these people I want to ask myself

Paul how did you pull off always being in an attitude of prayer how did you do that notice verse 4 as we answer the question what is it what is it Paul that you heard about these people that has prompted you to pray for them well since we heard of your faith faith in whom Christ Jesus what else and the love what kind of love the love that you have for each other verse 5 because of the hope hope laid up for you in heaven of which you previously heard in the word of truth the gospel it's come to you just as in the world also it's constantly bearing fruit multiplying oh wow oh wow oh wow this is it's been doing in you I'm thanking God that there is this bearing fruit and multiplying of fruit in you since the day you heard of the gospel the day you heard and understood the grace of God in the scripture the truth you learned it from Epaphras our fellow and beloved slave and servant of the Lord Jesus he informed us of your love in the spirit well we have a whole list of things here that

Paul has been told about these people's spiritual growth and he's over the moon let me tell you there's nothing more exciting to a pastor's heart than for a report to come back to him or for him to see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears the spiritual growth of the people that he's serving amen that's what fires our afterburners man that's what kicks it into high gear is when we see you wrestling through the issues of life and demonstrating a humble meek teachable spirit where you're learning to trust the Lord Jesus and you're giving yourself away to your brothers and sisters in life you're pushing away the distractions and discouragements of life not as if they don't exist you're not trying to cope you're not trying to psych yourself out and fool yourself about the realities no what are you doing you're moving through these issues trusting the Lord Jesus Christ and as your pastors see you doing that and moving through stumbling along and tripping and people coming alongside and grabbing you and saying come on brother I'll walk with you boy that's the ticket that's what being the people of

[10:30] God is all about but there are distractions and I'm going to mention some in a few minutes there are some things that want to pull you away from that kind of culture that kind of focus on Jesus Christ that kind of selflessness oh there are myriads of things that want to pull you away from that beloved and those are the things that Paul prays about as he prays for these people he's asking God to give them a spiritual laser focus on heavenly priorities for keeping them on the main thing and that's what my heart beats for that's what Greg's heart beats for that's what we pray for that's what we bleed for and weep for this is what we want to see in your lives as we take our cues from Jesus and the apostles and we come to you and say build your life on what Jesus and the apostles built their lives on follow us only only as you see us following

Christ because he's the Lord of the church that's where we come out so we see already that is the knowledge of God's truth the gospel of grace that is what has come to these people and it the it of this passage it is increasingly bearing spiritual fruit in their lives so what are we talking about we're talking about faith hope and love these three from first Corinthians 13 that's what he mentions in the passage I'm seeing you grow in your faith I'm seeing you grow in your hope I see you growing in love for each other and for the Lord and I see a foundation I see a culture in your church congregation and I'm it's being reported to me and I'm praising God for it Paul can't get enough of this verse eight actually sums up what Paul has told them look at verse eight with me who also informed us of your love in the spirit that's

Epaphras Epaphras was from this church in this area he knew these people here's how I put it up Epaphras also informed us of your love in the spirit now I want you to notice please this is a love given by the capital S that's how your Bible should read capital S given by the Holy Spirit it means it's a work of God saving favor God saving grace in their lives as God's people so this is not common grace this isn't the grace that God pours out on all people in the world at all times as he sends the rain and gives them food to eat and clothes to wear and gives them vehicles and vacations and babies and that's common grace that's God showering his grace on undeserving people all over the world no this is a special grace this is a saving favor for his saved people his born again people the Holy Spirit is working this where he starts what

I see in you and what excites me about what I see in you and what I'm honoring as I see it in you that just spurs me to praise God because I recognize that it's his work and so I'm going to give him the glory I may hug your neck and say sweet things to you about what I see God doing but I'm going to that we're going to have I think we do have it at grace Greg and I are so biased that it's it's absolutely impossible for he and I to be unbiased about this people come in new people there's some new faces here you're going to leave here today and you're going to talk in the car just like my wife and I do well what you think and you're going live with that but you talk it through and you ask yourself what was the vibe you know what did we pick up on it's impossible for

Greg and I at this point five years in to be unbiased about that vibe we can say I don't know we just know what we see in here as you grow in the Lord or as you face issues but the newer folks they're dialed into that and they're going to know so you know what we do we catch them and we ask them hey tell us tell us what what are you and they will most of them will tell us at some point or another a lot of them tell us without saying a word they never come back but some of them do but some of them do so we don't always know the point that I'm making in all of this is please notice that this is a work given by the Holy Spirit let's give the glory where the glory is due and be careful to do it look at Galatians if you would since we're very close turn if you would to Galatians chapter five because here is where we get a brief list there's another one in

[15 : 41] Colossians I'll show you in a moment here's where we get a brief list of what we're talking about in the way of these graces that God's working into our lives as believers and what we would be looking for in each other's lives in verse 22 but the fruit chapter five verse 22 but the fruit of the spirit that's the Holy Spirit the fruit the proof the evidence of the Holy Spirit working in your life is love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness self-control against such things there's no law those who belong to Christ Jesus are crucified in their flesh with its passions and desires so that in verse 25 we live by the Holy Spirit so let us walk or keep in step with the Spirit that is let us live a life of love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self-control so now you've got a tangible list of things to look for to recognize in each other's lives and so you want to ask yourself do

I see in my own life these kinds of qualities growing in me are these things a part of the lifestyle that I have toward the Lord and toward each other is that happening in my life and what might the absence of that growth mean in my life we've got to deal with that as well the evidence of these people's spiritual growth prompts prompts the apostle Paul to say what he does in verses 9 down through verse 12 he launches into prayer for that work of God's grace to continue in them any good pastor any faithful pastor will take those kinds of cues from his congregation as he sees God's working in them and speak to that right so we want to we want to major on the main thing and we want to be careful to keep the main thing the main thing what is it well I'm going to tell you I'm going to tell you let's deal with what

I'm talking about as I use the word prompt you've he's being prompted by what he's hearing about the report of these people's spiritual growth and it really excited so you can think of this as Paul's prayer cues his prayer signals moving and stimulating him to respond to God the first thing Paul does as he sees this happening in the lives of these people or he gets it reported to him I keep saying seen but he didn't see it it prompted him to praise God because he realizes where this is coming from spiritual growth has God as its author it's not a works thing that we gut out and produce in ourselves it's something that Jesus produces in us so that Paul would later tell the Philippians work out what

God is working in that's your role how do those two things come together what God is working in you work out in other words you're doing the loving God is loving through you but you're doing the loving you love you show the acts of love kindness mercy gentleness tenderness patience you're showing that in your life as God works those things in you through the power of the Holy Spirit you're you're looking for opportunities for that to work out of you toward others it's pretty straightforward isn't it it's pretty straightforward that's why I'm saying it's important for us to keep the main thing the main thing you know folks I don't know what God's going to do with this church family I don't know if we're going to go from 25 people to 500 people at one time and it doesn't matter to Greg and I at that juncture Greg and I may never see that we may go off this earth and we may have 100 people or whatever that really does not concern us but what

I am concerned with is whether we have 50 people or 500 we are careful to shepherd you in a way that helps you keep the main thing the main thing because the stakes are so high if we don't 30 years of doing this has taught me that and I have seen disaster happen in God's family because they lost their sight of keeping the main thing the main thing it's a lot easier to do than you might think and so we need to turn to the scripture and immerse ourselves marinate saturate ourselves in this wonderful truth that keeps us having the main thing the main thing Paul is responding to God in prayer for the Colossians and he is praying for their ongoing spiritual prophet now folks their growth in the Lord connects with and gives substance to what he now prays in verses 9 through 12 what he's heard of their growing increasing spiritual fruit their faith hope and love prompts him to ask

[21 : 11] God to what increase this work in them I love that I love that Paul is he is such a spiritually aggressive man there is no idleness in Paul whatsoever he is constantly looking to enter the battle the spiritual battle on behalf of his brothers and sisters on behalf of people like in this instance that he probably has never met to this point he has got these reports but he is so eager to enter into spiritual battle on behalf of other people and he does that here through prayer through prayer you see every single one of you here today who are born again in the Lord Jesus and trusting God for forgiveness of sin you have at least one critical ministry in our church even if you don't know what your spiritual gift is or your gifts are and that ministry is prayer you are thoroughly equipped to have a ministry of prayer for each other and for your pastors from the moment you're saved and the best thing for you to do to learn to pray is read the

Psalms I'm telling you read the Psalms and you'll learn how to pray read them every day and you will learn how to pray God will lift your spirit in worship to him and you'll you may be reading in the Psalms one day and read where David is saying God please help me I'm surrounded by all of this mess and it's just pouring down on me and night and day I'm soaking my pillow with tears God please if you don't come and rescue me I'm undone and you read that in the midst of something you're going through and you weep and you because you're praying his truth back to him from a content and heart of contrition of brokenness before the Lord it's just not rocket science Paul is praying for

God to increase this spiritual work in these people now this ongoing persistence in prayer for God's ongoing work of grace is actually brought out in the next part of verse 9 we're just doing a couple verses in this context look again so we've already covered that the reason is because of their love in the spirit that he that he is being reported to him they're growing in since the day we heard that look we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the full knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding the question that I want to ask as a Christian and a pastor is Paul how did you pull off not ceasing to pray for these people since the day you heard of this spiritual growth in their lives how did you pull that off what does that even mean what does that look like what if it had been weeks or months you know snail mail guys how long did it take for guys to write letters and start walking and get to some place hundreds of miles away took a while maybe they had to take a boat a cart a horse at best whatever most of it was just walking so

I'm imagining that it's been at least weeks since this report came to Paul then since he sat down and wrote this letter the cautions and then had Epaphras go back and deliver it to him and he says I've been praying for you since that time and my prayers haven't ceased boy that's a challenge what does that even mean is that just hyperbole are we reading a place here in the Bible where Paul doesn't really mean that no I think he means it I don't have any reason to doubt it there's nothing in the context that would cause me to doubt it what's he talking about again having heard of their spiritual growth he simply encourages them with the idea I am firmly committed to praying for you so what does not ceased mean what does that what does that even mean let me give you the second one that's what we want to deal with it means exactly what you think it means it means ongoing ongoing to put it in the positive unceasing in the negative put it in the positive it means ongoing continuing what does that mean

Paul lived in an ongoing spiritual attitude of prayerful dependence and praise towards God so as Paul heard these kind of reports coming back to him or saw it with his own eyes because he was a man that was already fully committed to God in these spiritual matters it just lifted his soul it came out of him so naturally it was an attitude and a spirit and an occasion for worship I'm hearing this I'm seeing this and it brings me to worship God in these moments let me say it this way friends what fueled Paul's ministry of prayer for others what here it is praying for others was an act of worship for Paul now friends I want to challenge you at this point pastorally to think about your prayer life and to ask you is your prayer life about worshiping God God is it something that you often feel guilty about because you don't do enough of it or you told someone you pray for them and you really never did and the next time you saw them you want to say

[26 : 52] I've been praying for you but you kind of because you didn't see we don't want you to live like that that we don't want you to have to live with that kind of thing going there's another way there's an alternative and that is for you to make praying for others about you worshiping your God you're making it part of who you are as you surrender to the Lord as you offer him praise it's a very natural thing for you to think of people and see their faces and then begin to pray for them you say Jeff I have a problem I always end up just praying the same things well brother and sister that's better than not praying but we'll take you further we'll help you go a little further we'll give you 66 books to pray for them about an endless amount of content that you will never exhaust in ten lifetimes read the Bible and then pray as

Paul prays pray the Bible back to God for your brothers and your sisters we try to demonstrate that every Sunday that Greg and I come whether he's preaching or I'm preaching we open to a place in the Bible we read it and then we take our prayer prompts from that passage and pray it back to God on your behalf try to model it this is a beautiful thing that we do for each other Paul is committed to a persistent life of prayer and what fueled that prayer life for others was Paul was all about worshiping God in his prayer life his attitude towards prayer for them was God's work of grace in you is important to me to us and we promise to remember you in prayer as we worship the Lord when we worship God as we go about worshiping the Lord in our lifestyle we are constantly unceasingly remembering you in prayer and bringing you before the Lord I've shared with our folks who know me over these five years they've heard me say this you need to think of ways that you can make an attitude of prayer a more robust part of who you are in your walk with the

Lord and for you it might look different than it is for me now here's one of under much conviction of the spirit about this I was so into music that I couldn't go anywhere in my life that I didn't have something playing music whether it was the old Walkmans and all that nonsense something like that or the car the first thing I do is make sure I had the car tuned in well I turned all that off and I told the Lord I'm going to spend the next year no music I'm going to take a fast from music because it's an idol in my life and I know it and I'm going to use the time I was listening to music to pray so I did and you know that habit stuck and I've never lost it I cannot even get in the car now and turn the radio on I cannot do it when I'm driving in the car I'm trying to keep my mind on praying and it's just become that's just what I do now so if you ever pull up next to me and you see my mouth running or tears running down my cheeks

I'm fine it's all good I'm not leaving the world and my mind I'm just talking to the Lord chances are I may be talking to him about you that's what I do among other things you find what works for you but the challenge is pray pray because prayer is a means to keep the main thing the main thing and I am not going to tell you the main thing until we get to the very end what are we talking about well persistence in prayer requires devotion toward God and spiritual diligence toward people you see that do you see where we are right now in that you probably thinking that boy this is what just preaching right now isn't as much about prayer as it is about me loving the Lord and worshiping God from a heart of devotion that's right that's where prayer begins in a heart devoted to the

Lord true prayer and then you're probably thinking to yourself boy this this is a commitment to my brothers and sisters this is taking me to another level of understanding what it means to be a Christian and be part of a growing family of believers that's right it takes diligence you've got to be committed to their welfare and that's going to cost you being committed to the welfare of other people cost you every married person in here should have said amen because you know being married costs being committed to your spouse is a pricey thing hopefully your spouse is making the cost a little more palatable for you but nevertheless there's a price to be paid isn't there you have to be willing to be watchful alert and selfless not jealous envious and lazy so Paul is showing us what to look and to listen for in the spiritual lives of other people how to use what we see and hear in their lives as signals for what to pray for them and this requires that you be committed to heavenly mindedness you need to learn to look and listen and draw out of other people in a manner where you are listening in a heavenly mind you're listening for the work of

[32 : 35] God and you're looking for the work of God in their asking questions that probe it sometimes you'll get answers that help you know how to pray for something that they're struggling with there's a weakness and you'll pray with them about that sometimes it's a praise it's something that you see that they're overcoming in and they're growing in and you can offer prayer about see but the point is you're being spiritually vigilant this is how we have a heavenly mindedness toward other people Paul is telling these believers what he's recognized as God's work in them faith hope and love and he's telling them what he's praying for on their behalf based on his observation what an encouraging thing look with me since you're in Colossians look at chapter three and you'll get another of these lists like we saw in Galatians five but here's one right now here's how my

Bible reads from verse 12 of chapter three so as the elect of God holy and beloved put on a heart of compassion kindness humility gentleness and patience bearing with one another and graciously forgiving each other whoever has a complaint against anyone just as the Lord graciously forgave you so also should you and above all these things here's a surprise put on love no surprise which is the perfect bond of what in the church unity and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and lest we forget be thankful let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs see

Paul is calling these people to this attitude of looking for these things in each other's lives and then what do we do we thank God for what we're seeing him do in these lives we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly with all wisdom and we teach each other and warn each other with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs we sing with gratefulness and our hearts to God so that whatever we do in word or deed we're doing all of it in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to him in all things this is what we're called to this is what the Christian life looks like these are the things that you and I are looking for these are the things that we're trying to encourage each other in and nurture as a church family in one another I need that you need that now we read this and we need to ask ourselves some sobering questions to help us own this as a church family I want to get kind of practical with you now in this alright so ask ask this and let me let me just do a few things with you what kind of church culture are you helping to nurture here at Grace

Church Williamsburg is it a culture where we are being prompted to prayer for each other because we are watchful we're looking for it how are you participating in helping that culture to flourish among us you see as as this is one of the trip hazards that pastors face and pastoral ministry and that churches face in church life it's when we try to get applicational we are tempted to put application before doctrine we want to run right to well what does this mean for me well how do I use this before we understand what it means foundationally to Christ we need Jesus to teach us to teach us before we try to apply what it means in our lives but we want to run to the other let me just get to how this works in my life but you better understand the foundation of the truth that you're being taught before you try to make application of it or you're getting the cart before the horse do you understand or am

I need some feedback here tracking okay all right so we don't want to be applicational before we're doctrinal this is why Paul has spent the chapters that he's spending in most of his epistles in the first part of the chapters the first part of the books he's laying out the foundation of doctrine he's talking about this is what we need to believe here are the truths now I'm going to help you take those truths and derive principles from those truths for holy living but the first thing you need to know is what to believe because we live out of what we believe we live out of what we believe so we've got to get this doctrinal thing done here's what so many pastors in churches are being tempted to do and they have been for decades now with the entire market driven seeker sensitive make everybody a consumer in church mentality that is absolutely destroying churches everywhere and has been for decades now it's not a new thing here's what happens they are tempted to think big and busy

[38 : 18] I'm just trying to find handles for you to hold on to this they are tempted to think big and busy when it comes to what it means to cultivate a church culture big and busy we need to wow them we need to think about people coming in and visiting our church and being a part of our church and they need to come in each Sunday and we need to have some kind of wow factor they need to be wowed they need to be entertained they need to be pulled in to this bigness and the bigness is typically built around some event or program the problem is you cannot program your way into spiritual maturity you cannot do it programs will never ever guarantee spiritual maturity the kind of maturity that Paul is seeing here and praising God for you can't do it I preached a sermon not very very long ago where this title was go big and go home not either or you know heard the saying go big or go home well in the scripture it's both you can go big and you can go home and the big is

Jesus and if you have the big of Jesus in you then you can go home true home good home heavenly home but what what happens when we don't cultivate a church culture around what Paul is praying for here and what Paul is zeroing in on here in the way of their maturity then we build it on something else and what we win people with is what we win people to so what do we want to win them with what do we want people to see more than anything else when they come to our church and they're a part of what we are and they get to know us and they're trying to figure the vibe out and they're trying to figure out how this thing is working here at grace we want them to see a group of people committed to Jesus Christ and him alone that we are trying to get out of ourselves get ourselves out of the way so that people can see the work of Jesus as God conforms us in the power of the Holy Spirit to greater and greater Christ likeness I want you to see more and more of Jesus in me not Jeff and when you see more and more of Jesus in me and you speak to that I want to be able for us to grab each other and say let's just give

God the glory for that right now because if it weren't for the Lord none of that be happening in me or you and boy now we're worshiping that's a worshiping church that's a church committed to the main thing and that's what we have to do my first series of experiences in my first staff position out of seminary was a disaster in the sense that I was involved and I didn't know any better at the time I was involved in a church where all of this seeker sensitive stuff and big event stuff was the thing and what I did was over the time I was there I saw how what we were doing was taking people and grabbing them you know like this and like this and we were just heaving them into the machine and letting the machine grind them up and so the people became the grease for the machine we got it all backwards and I watched families get chewed up and spit out and leave exhausted because we as a staff had come to the decision that being busy was the same thing as being spiritual and it's not it's not you can come to church you can read the Bible you can serve every time the doors are open you can do all these different things folks being busy like that is no guarantee that you're going to grow spiritually in devotion to

Jesus it might actually be something that distracts you and you might find that you're a fraud you might find that what you're doing has nothing to do with love for Jesus Christ it has everything to do with kind of trying to convince yourself that you're a spiritual person and you're not be careful this is why the main thing is so important we cannot be here at Grace Church Williamsburg about anything other than the main thing as we measure who we are and what we do against the main thing constantly asking ourselves will this help us move closer to the main thing will it keep us in the main avenue so here's what I'm not saying I'm not saying programs are of the devil I'm saying we have to be careful we need structure in the church amen we need administration we need structure we cannot make the structure God we will do some things in this church and they'll live a little while and then they'll not need to live anymore and so we get rid of them the hard part is what if that's been your thing so now you feel like getting rid of your thing is tantamount to insulting you have you ever seen that in the church how dare you we don't have business meetings here at Grace you know why because we're not going to give a forum for that kind of thing we're going to lead as pastors we're going to ask you to follow us as we follow the

Lord we're going to keep you involved in that but we're not going to make a forum for people to come in with their fives hurt and and tell everybody about it it's not going to happen here it's not because we're dictatorial it's because we want to keep the main thing the main thing and that is not the way to do it an experience over 30 years has taught me that I don't even know how to do that other model well I don't know how to do it because I don't know how to make it a biblical thing I don't know how so again what kind of church culture are we helping to nurture here at Grace Church what are you doing about helping nurture that thank you for letting me get on my soapbox there for a minute now let's move on it is a powerfully encouraging thing when someone tells you that they see evidence of God's grace in your life is it not and then they add that they are praying for you to continue to grow in these ways I see God working in you in this way Nolan I just wanted to let you know that brother

[44 : 23] I've been noticing that over the past few weeks and I didn't want to be remiss and come in and let you know it's a blessing to see God working in your life that way and you know what man I was praying for you the other day about it that God would just keep on doing that in your life I love you man stay the course all right so here's here's what we want to do here's what we want to turn that into in an applicational way for the life of our church family here's what we want to do I'm not trying to be cute I'm trying to help you get a handle and hold on to it when you recognize spiritual growth in someone's life TPT them what in the world is this dude talking about with TPT all right all right I'll show you here look thank God for that work in them you see that in the text I'm just pulling this right out of our text for this morning Paul is thanking God for these people as he prays for them I thank God for you that's the way he started all right what's number two P pray that the

Lord will further that work of grace in them you see that right in the text and then finally number three take time to tell them take time to tell them all three of these are critically important I just don't want you to do the first two and then neglect number three you got to finish the job you got to get that last T in there TPT you see we have the prompts we have the prompts and the persistence in our prayers for other believers to help us pray without ceasing we're defining what it means to pray in an attitude of an unceasing intercession and petition for others the prompts concern our spiritual watchfulness we're we're alert we're vigilant we're looking for we're recognizing God's work of grace and another believer and we're being moved to prayer and praise as an attitude of worship the persistence involves our attitudes and actions of faithfully praying for them and verbally affirming them verbally affirming them I need to say a couple more things about this before I move on remember prayer for others was worship for Paul so are you nurturing spiritual watchfulness towards your spouse are you recognizing the work of the Lord in your spouse are you recognizing the work of the Lord in your kids your friends your brothers and sisters here at GCW are you learning to be spiritually vigilant are you learning to listen and look for those spiritual cues that will help you know how to pray for them so what might it look like for you to be verbally affirming to someone here in our church family well it's what I just did with no one it's the example I just gave you with no one this is different from a compliment we're not talking about paying each other compliments compliments are things like this well you you look nice in that outfit I paid one of our ladies a compliment this morning and I said just about that very thing look very nice today not that she doesn't look nice other day that's that's the does this dress make me look fat question you just you cannot win you cannot win with that question so I've asked Suzanne please let's make that one taboo okay don't don't ask me that one another compliment would be I like the way you've done your hair or you've got a nice voice those are compliments those are kind blessings for sure no doubt about it but spiritual encouragement identifies and affirms the Holy

Spirit's work remember I made a big deal out of the capital S this is a work of the Spirit so we are affirming the work of the Spirit the spiritual Holy Spirit fruit bearing that you see in a believer's life and here's another thing I want to ask us to do here at grace please don't worry about qualifying your encouragement with things like this now I don't want to give you the big head right I don't want to puff you up but I want don't do that don't and the reason that we don't want to do that is I don't think we risk this kind of ongoing biblical encouragement creating a bunch of egomaniacs in our church I just don't think that's going to happen why well let me ask you this how often does this happen in your own home and among your own family that people will affirm you spiritually affirm you in the work that they see God doing in your life how many times did it happen last week the week before how many times in the last month let's take it out even more how about in the last six months how many times has someone else in your life walked up to you and spiritually affirmed a work of the Lord in your life over the last six months how many times just think about that most of us we don't we don't all not only not get affirmed we get something else that's very different from being spiritually affirmed is that not true is that the world you live in what do people usually lead with when they approach you and they want to talk to you about something hey man I got something I want to talk to you about and you go you get the email you get the text hey man we need to we need to meet and you think oh heavens criticism this is not criticism and this is not compliments this is spiritual affirmation about the work of the spirit in someone's life it's gold it's life it's a beautiful gift that you can give to people but you got to be spiritually diligent you got to be devoted to the Lord to do it or it just won't happen and this is not flattery finally this is not flattery so it's it's not criticism it's not compliments it's not flattery it's spiritual affirmation flattery is self-centered you understand that flattery is self-centered flattery is excessive it's insincere it's hypocritical praise towards someone it's worldly and it's unhelpful and there's always some type of manipulative element behind flattery I'm flattering you because I want something I'm flattering you because I want you to give me something and it may be as simple as I'm going to give you some compliment so that you'll give me one back it could be as simple as that no it's not flattery what we have here in the example of Paul in Colossians one is not flattery it's spiritual affirmation Holy

Spirit affirmation God working in someone's life all right here's what I want you to see flattery wants something from you biblical affirmation wants something for you flattery cheapens the relationship spiritual affirmation deepens the relationship flattery is aimed at you godly affirmation is aimed at God working in and through you this is how we are sincere with one another which is what Paul and Peter tell us to be be sincere with one another speak the truth in love and so what is it that you're doing with these verbal affirmations why are you doing all of this with the person well verses five and six in Colossians one look at this because of the hope laid up for you in heaven of which you previously heard in the word of truth the gospel which has come to you just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and multiplying just as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard and understood the grace of

God in truth this is why we do this why Jeff let's put a fine point on it you are giving voice to the gratitude you feel towards God for the clear evidence of God's gospel bearing fruit and increasing in the life of another human being you are not missing an opportunity to recognize it and then to thank God for it and bring in praise for it and worship him for it in other words you're glorifying God for it and he receives that that is what Paul is doing and praying for these Christians as I mentioned before even though I think Paul has never personally met these people I don't think Paul ever visited Colossae at least to this point of the writing of this letter but he's verbally exalting God by affirming what he's heard about these people in their spiritual growth so we're prompted in prayer by what we see the Lord doing in a believer's life and then we persist in prayer for that growth now there is a priority there is a priority that you need to have for what you pray say Jeff what what are we what are we needing to make sure we focus in on here there is a priority and here it is the priority also and to ask that you may be filled from the text in verse 9 with the full knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding now we're back to Proverbs 4 that we read earlier this is the priority what does it mean just like God's will for where he wants me to go to college is that what it means who

[53 : 20] I'm supposed to marry if we should buy a new car if we should get this house if we should become members of this church all of those things are important but no that's not what we're talking about here when we talk about being full of the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding even though those things are important the key to recognizing what this knowledge of his will is in the very next phrase beloved would you look at it with me the very next phrase what does it say in all spiritual wisdom and understanding we want to be full of the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding what I tell you anytime you see spiritual like that context in New Testament it's speaking of the Holy Spirit's work or a spiritual work in people and that's what we're talking about this is wisdom from God in scripture that you own the wisdom of God in scripture that so you're making yourself teachable you're you're encountering this wisdom from the Lord this instruction from God and you're receiving it you're receptive you're teachable you're moldable you're humble you're meek about that truth you're not fighting it you're not doubting it if you question you question help me understand it better Lord kind of thing so the first thing you're doing is you're receiving this wisdom all right and then the second thing understanding understanding is applying that wisdom so you pray God help me to receive it help me to be wise help me to own your truth then you ask

God help me to understand it that is help me to apply it in my life based on what you're teaching me see so that's wisdom and understanding that's the same thing we read in Proverbs 4 was you read wisdom and understanding back and forth spiritual or of the Holy Spirit as I explained a moment ago there it is that means a heavenly origin it's spiritual and not worldly so this is opposed to man's wisdom not of man but for man wisdom and understanding are used together for force of impact together they emphasize deep insight weighty thorough mature understanding about the issues of life from a spiritual frame of reference a heavenly mindedness you can't get that apart from doctrine you can't get that in in programs that are designed to wow people you get that by sitting under the word you get that by speaking the truth and love to each other you get that by praying for each other in spiritual ways about spiritual matters that's the life of the body so this is this is personal here's what we're talking about this is personal knowledge of God's truth alive in your heart by the Holy Spirit so that you see this life from a heavenly frame of reference oh my goodness how important is that so this is the paradigm of heavenly living Paul's praying for these people where do

Christians get this wisdom and understanding they get it from God alone where has God made known to us this wisdom and understanding in Scripture alone in God alone in Scripture alone here's here's one of the ways Proverbs speaks about it for the Lord gives wisdom from his mouth come knowledge and understanding amen and then we have this one the fear of the Lord that is the ability to have an awe toward God an awe you're awe inspired by the Lord that's the fear is the beginning of knowledge fools despise wisdom and instruction we don't want to be fools about this in Colossians 2 2 and 3 Paul tells us that Jesus is the treasure of wisdom he himself is the treasure of wisdom so God is concerned that we know how he wants us to live he wrote down the knowledge of his will for us in the Bible and these are the absolute trustworthy truths of Scripture he's revealed his mind to us so that we will live his mind according to what he's told us we live the thoughts of God and we think the thoughts of God after him how do I know the mind of God how do I know what God thinks about marriage and kids and work and and trials and pain and people persecuting me and being in trouble and it's right here in the Scriptures God has given us his mind on that that we will think his thoughts so this is a mind saturated for holy living with the truth of the Lord so let me ask you real quickly here what are you filling your mind and your life with what are you filled up what are you pouring in to yourself another way I could ask it is what are you allowing through your eye and ear gates what are you allowing through your eye and your ear gates because that's what's informing your heart and that's what's serving to form who you are finally just real quickly here's where I tell you the main thing purpose purpose notice verse 10 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord to please him in all respects there's your main thing that's so that purpose clause in verse 10 that's how it begins that's a purpose clause verse 9 for this reason we've prayed for you in these ways we want you to be filled with the full knowledge of God's will and spiritual wisdom and understanding purpose so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord notice what it doesn't say so that you can get rich so that you won't have any problems so that you'll always be happy clappy no so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord to please him in all respects and bearing fruit in every good work and multiplying in the full knowledge of God why because that is a testimony that you belong to Jesus that's a life that testifies I belong to Christ my heart is owned by Jesus and I can't get over it I refuse to get over it this is the main thing a life worthy of Jesus so walking in a lifestyle of honoring Jesus showcasing his character God's spiritual wisdom and understanding for living life as a Christian provides the life compass that keeps us pointing in true spiritual north that is to a Jesus worthy God honoring life our biblical knowledge of God's will is not the end but the means to the end prayer is not the main thing it's a means toward the main thing what is that walking in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus to please him in all respects that's the main thing and everything at grace is measured by the main thing is this going

to help our people walk in a manner worthy of their Lord to please him in all respects and we may say yes this is a good thing that will help do that and then we may discern as elders and say but this thing over here will do that even better let's do this one right now and let's see if maybe down the road this one might have its time but right now this better thing will help you see that's discernment choosing between the good and the best not just the evil and the good all right let me give you this and I'm done being filled with the knowledge of his will helps us exalt God in worship and being filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding helps us exhort or spiritually affirm one another in godly living so we're exalting God and we're exhorting one another encouraging prompts persistence priority and purpose in prayer if you set your heart to a tpt a believer uh this week and and if you do if you tpt a believer this week you thank you thank

God for them you pray that God will continue that work and then you go tell them that you're seeing God do that work in their life now again this is not you coming up to them and saying I got a word from the Lord don't do that unless you quote scripture right after that all right this is you coming up to your brothers and sisters and saying hey I see God working in your life and man it's such an encouragement I love the way the Lord is working in you and thank you thank you for your teachable spirit and your kindness I'm praying for you and I'm thanking God for you let's pray together father these practical matters of your word encourage our hearts and we recognize that and I would be remiss if I didn't do this in my prayer now just recognizing that all of this is built on the foundation that you have made us in your image and that sin marred that image and so we need a savior we need a savior to help save us from this terrible corruption that is obscuring your image in our lives thanks be to you as you have given us in Jesus Christ the hope of our salvation so that in him is faith hope and love in him are the treasures of wisdom thank you that we can look to you now thank you that we can cry out to you and say God save me God help me to trust Christ for the forgiveness of my sins in him alone help me to look to you to bear the burden of my sin as you have paid the penalty and help me God to be freed as you make me your child so that I can worship you and follow you I pray that you would do that in each life here this morning thank you for your goodness and your grace in Christ Jesus name we pray amen