

A Deeper Pursuit

Colossians 1.9-14

Scripture reading: Psalm 1

What lies beneath the surface is more important than what is clearly visible above it. Take a tree for example. How strong would a tree be if its root system was small and shallow? Would it be able to withstand drought parching the topsoil? Would it be able to withstand high winds bending its boughs?

Next to the first house we owned in Grand Rapids, MI, stood a stately elm tree. Perhaps a hundred years, it stood about 35 metres tall, and was a solid, healthy tree.

I never took much notice of that tree . . . until the day I had to dig up two fuel oil tanks buried beside it. Suddenly that tree was all I could think about. What lies beneath the surface is more important than what is clearly visible above it. The thick roots of that tree reached downward about as far as its branches went upward – and much wider. Like massive tentacles, the roots wrapped themselves around the oil tanks and made an already difficult job nearly impossible.

I did a little research on trees this week. I learned that on average, the root system is three times larger than the crown. I also learned that gum trees are king when it comes to roots. The deepest observable living tree roots are in Tasmania – over 60 metres deep!

Obviously, the deeper the root system, the stronger the tree. The same principle applies to believers. The more deeply our roots stretch into the nourishment of God and His Word, the stronger we will be – able to withstand both the seasons of drought and the onslaught of stormy winds.

How deep are your roots? What lies beneath the surface is more important than what is clearly visible above it.

Sermon in a Sentence: **The deeper the roots, the stronger the believer.**

In this series through Paul's inspired letter to the Colossians, we are learning about life management – and it is all about growth and change. To put it bluntly, if we stop growing; if we stop changing; we're dead. So let us go on to grow upward and outward, supported by roots that go downward into the richness of God.

The opening verses of this letter challenged us to grow broader in our perspective. We saw that having an awareness to earnestly pray for others and to praise others is an essential part of spiritual maturity. We also saw that eagerly anticipating good things to come and positive changes to be made in us by God is important. And all of these things must be wrapped up in an attitude of gratitude.

That is growing broader. Today's text challenges us to grow deeper – like tree roots.

The deeper the roots, the stronger the believer. Let's continue on in Colossians and discover three ways we must always be growing deeper.

1. Grow Deeper in Discernment (v 9)

Colossians 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹ **For this reason we** also, since the day we heard it, **do not cease to pray for you**, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Paul commits to pray for the Colossian believers – not once, but unceasingly. And he says he is motivated to do so for a specific reason. What is that reason?

The phrase ‘since we heard it’ points to the reason. You will find that same phrase in verse 4.

Colossians 1:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ **since we heard** of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and of your **love** for all the saints; ⁵ because of the **hope** which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,

Paul is motivated to pray precisely because the Colossians evidence the marks of truly converted people. They publicly profess faith in Christ Jesus – even Paul, under house arrest in Rome, has heard it. They live out their faith by loving *all* the saints – not just the ones they find agreeable. And they are focused on the hope of eternity – which means material possessions and pleasures are probably not that important to them.

That is a great place to be. A testimony of conversion. Faith, hope and love. But it is no place to stay. Paul will not put a tick next to their names on his prayer list as if they have already attained maturity. He feels compelled to do the opposite – to pray all the more urgently that they will never become satisfied; that they will never stagnate; that they will press upward and outward and, most importantly, downward with deeper roots.

Now if you find that to be a sobering thought, you are hearing the verse correctly. Conversion is not the outcome of some prayer we prayed or some religious experience we had. Conversion is change – wrought by the powerful intervention of God so that darkness changes to light and death changes to life, and we are never the same again. And the change keeps penetrating, causing us to grow more and more devout and holy.

Salvation is instantaneous and eternal. Sanctification, however, is progressive – true believers grow over time. If sanctification is absent, was the salvation genuine? Perhaps not.

Is everyone hearing my voice right now converted? God only knows. I fear that some of us might not be. We would all do well, then, to examine ourselves. Jesus has already warned that not everyone who says, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter His kingdom (Matthew 7.21).

Here are some penetrating questions to ask ourselves:

- Has my faith in Christ Jesus been heard – do the people around me know that I unashamedly identify with Christ?
- Has my love for Christ Jesus been shown – actively putting all people ahead of myself?

- Has my hope in Christ Jesus been secure – easily letting go of worldly possessions and pleasures?

If you cannot answer ‘yes’ to those questions, then this is the day to repent and cry out for God’s mercy. But even if you can answer ‘yes’, you cannot relax. That is the point of verse 9.

Jesus once told a parable about a man who sowed seed – and the seed represents the Word of God. Some fell on the footpath and the birds ate it. Some fell on thin soil, started to grow but dried up quickly because it had no roots. Some fell on soil that was contaminated with weeds and was soon choked out. Only a few seeds fell on good ground, put down deep roots and produced abundant fruit (Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23).

The soil, of course, represents human hearts. Some hearts are hard as a footpath – the Word of God bounces right off and Satan devours it. Some are rather thin – the Word of God starts to take root, but never goes deep enough to bring change. Some are compromised with competing desires – wanting the best of both worlds – and again the Word of God does not have its desired effect. It is only in a few hearts that the Word takes hold and fruit results.

Here’s the sobering part: Of these four, which are converted? Only the last one. The thin heart may have prayed a prayer. The compromised heart may have had a religious experience. But only the one that endures to the end with fruitfulness is converted (Matthew 10.22).

Could the Colossian believers be false believers? Could they still fall away – thereby showing they were not genuinely converted? More to the point, could we?

This is Paul’s concern, and so he prays for them to grow deeper in discernment . . . in two ways.

a. Of God’s Will

Colossians 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹ . . . that you **may be filled** with the **knowledge of His will** in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

To our ears, this prayer may sound like a dull formality with its theological language. But to the Colossians, it felt sharp and piercing – not theological, practical. Paul is praying specifically and idealistically.

Paul specifically uses the word ‘knowledge’ because it was a catch word in that day. Just as the word ‘green’ attracts instant attention today – green cars, green houses, green political agendas – so the word ‘knowledge’ attracted attention then. Everyone was keen on knowledge – of the secret and sensational kind.

You can see that the Colossians had a craving for knowledge from a couple things Paul says later in the letter.

Colossians 2:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Now this I say lest anyone should **deceive you with persuasive words**.

Colossians 2:8 (NKJV)

⁸ Beware lest anyone **cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit**, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

The Colossians' craving for knowledge made them vulnerable to false teachers peddling phony ideas. Paul prays that they'll seek no other knowledge than the knowledge of God's Will. He further specifies that this comes through spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding. (Note the word 'spiritual' modifies both wisdom and understanding – indicating that both are Holy Spirit-enabled.)

So, specifically, Paul prays that they would be led by the Holy Spirit to know God's Will.

Idealistically, Paul wants this knowledge to fill them – leaving no room for competing knowledge or even self-knowledge. He desires that they would aspire and progress toward God's holy purpose for their life.

That is a tall order . . . and God knows this. That is where the Holy Spirit comes in. His enablement is necessary to cause us to know God's Will, to accept God's Will and to do God's Will. Notice the word 'all' before wisdom and spiritual in verse 9.

What great news! We have all the resources we need to grow deeper in discernment because all genuine believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Now I want to say one thing about the Will of God before we move on. The Will of God is sometimes more about accepting God's sovereignty than about doing His work. We tend to think about it only in terms of the later – i.e. 'what is God calling me to do'.

Yes, it is true that the 'knowledge of His will' sometimes has us doing something – such as Steve and Kayte becoming members of Cornerstone Baptist Church today. They discerned that it was God's will for them to join. But what about the circumstance of the believer who learns she has cancer? What if that cancer is inoperable? Is this not God's will, too? Does He not control all things for the good of those who love Him?

Here is where the depth of our roots is tested . . . and extended. In circumstances such as these, are we filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding? If so, we will echo the words of Job, 'blessed be the name of the Lord.'

Paul prays that they will grow deeper in discernment of God's Will. He further prays that they will grow deeper in discernment of God's nature – that is, who God is.

b. Of God's Nature

Colossians 1:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work **and increasing in the knowledge of God**;

Jesus defined eternal life as knowing God (John 17.3), and the quality of that knowledge is intimate and personal – not merely a bunch of facts. The word translated knowledge

in Colossians 1.10 is the highest form – supreme and thorough, according to Vine’s Dictionary – the kind that you only have from living with someone.

It is essential to know God’s Will. It is even more essential to know God Himself. And the biggest prayer concern for Paul is that this knowledge would always be increasing.

How deep do your roots go in the discernment of God’s will and nature? Are your roots going deeper?

The deeper the roots, the stronger the believer.

So the first way we must grow is deeper in discernment. The second way is . . .

2. Grow Deeper in Daily Walk (v 10)

This is an inseparable partner to the first. If we know God’s Will, but do not do it, we are hypocrites.

You can easily see that these two must go together by the way Paul writes. Look for the repetition of the phrase ‘you may’. That’s prayer point one (discernment) and prayer point two (daily walk).

Colossians 1:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that **you may be filled with the knowledge** of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰that **you may walk worthy of the Lord**, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

The goal is to walk worthy of the Lord, and there are two steps to attain this goal. Firstly, there is the step . . .

a. Of Pleasing God

Colossians 1:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰that you may walk worthy of the Lord, **fully pleasing Him** . . .

Here again is idealism. Paul prays that they might fully please God . . . not merely attempt to please God or partially please God, but to please God in all things.

Is God pleased in our thought-life? Is God pleased in our attitudes? Is God pleased in our words? Is God pleased in our actions?

Is He pleased in how I conduct myself at home? At work? At school?

Growing deeper in daily walk means pleasing God in every deed in every place. That is step one. Secondly, there is the step . . .

b. Of Producing Fruit

Colossians 1:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, **being fruitful in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Now we can be sure that if we are fully pleasing God, this second step will follow quite naturally. Once again, the standard is idealism – not a few good works, but every good work – everything I do, say and think is profitable for God.

In what ways are you being fruitful for God? Are you effectively influencing others to grow deeper in the Lord? What spiritual impact are you having here at church? At work? At home?

Do you get the point that Paul is praying them on to perfection? He won't stop praying until they are filled and have all and do every. And we mustn't stop either. We must pray urgently for one another and for ourselves that we would keep growing deeper.

And we must go beyond praying to actually doing something about it – producing fruit. As the writer of Hebrews puts it –

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NKJV)

²⁴And let us consider **one another** in order to **stir up love and good works**, ²⁵not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but **exhorting one another**, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

I think we are all keenly aware that we do not always walk worthy of the Lord; we do not live up to the ideal. That awareness is actually a good thing . . . because it motivates us to pray and to keep growing.

The deeper the roots, the stronger the believer.

The first way we must grow deeper is in discernment – Do I know God and His Will? Am I genuinely converted? The second way is to grow deeper in daily walk – Do I please God? Am I producing fruit? The third and final way is actually foundational to the previous two . . . to:

3. Grow Deeper in Dependency (vv 11-14)

Colossians 1:11-14 (NKJV)

¹¹**strengthened with all might**, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹²giving thanks to the Father who has **qualified us** to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³He has **delivered us** from the power of darkness and **conveyed us** into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴in whom we have **redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of sins.

Praise God for these verses. It is God Himself who causes us to grow deeper – and He is fully adequate for the task. It is His glorious power that strengthens us will – here's another ideal – all might for all patience and all longsuffering (endurance) with all joy. How good is that?

More than this, it is He who qualifies us, delivers us and conveys us – through the blood of Christ. Let's think about the power that is there when we grow deeper in dependency.

a. Of Power for deliverance (v 13a)

Colossians 1:13 (NKJV)

¹³ He has **delivered us from the power of darkness** . . .

The world is becoming darker with every passing year. Contempt for God is very public – the new atheism is gaining momentum and attacking anyone who would believe in Christ. And wickedness is everywhere. Things that were once too shameful to talk about are even in private are now paraded through town and applauded.

The power of darkness is strong . . . but not strong enough. Greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world (1 John 4.4).

So . . . if we have been delivered by Christ, we must grow deeper in depending on Him, in full confidence that He is more than able for . . .

i. Enabling endurance (v 11)

Colossians 1:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for **all patience and longsuffering** with joy;

This time the idealism is God's responsibility. It is not something He must grow into – He already possesses it in perfection, and He applies it to us. Right now, His glorious power is sufficient to give us all patience and longsuffering. By His might, we can and we will endure.

What is more, our endurance will not be with gritted teeth or high anxiety. No, Christ is more than able for endurance and for . . .

ii. Enabling enthusiasm (v 12)

Colossians 1:11-12 (NKJV)

¹¹ . . . with **joy**; ¹² **giving thanks** to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

How good is it to be a Christian! Our experience in life is unrivalled. No guilt. No fear. No confusion. No condemnation. Even when we suffer, and we must endure, we have abundant reason to rejoice. Because our sovereign God is in control; He is working out His good purposes in our life; and He is with us bearing our burdens and soothing our hurts.

Are you thankful to God? He has delivered us from darkness. But there is more. He not only delivers us out of . . . He conveys us into. So let's grow deeper in dependency for the glory . . .

b. Of Power for conveyance (v 13b)

Colossians 1:13 (NKJV)

¹³ He has . . . **conveyed us into the kingdom** of the Son of His love,

This is a satisfying place to live – where Christ is king, and pain and sorrow and death are banished. All of this is from God. None of this is from us. We are unworthy, yet exceedingly blessed recipients.

Paul speaks of the cost to God and the benefit to us. He speaks of . . .

i. Enabling redemption (v 14a)

Colossians 1:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood . . .

What a wonder that God would love us so much to send His only Son to die in our place. Redemption means to purchase. Jesus purchased us with the currency of His blood that was shed on the cross.

Notice that Paul does not pray about redemption – as if it is something we need more and more of. He speaks of it in the past tense. It has already happened. Christ paid for our sin once for all.

For all who are truly converted, this redemption is fully effective for . . .

ii. Enabling forgiveness (v 14b)

Colossians 1:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, **the forgiveness of sins.**

I often quote 1 John 1.7b – ‘The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.’ What a comfort this truth is – that our sins in the past, our sins in the present, and our sins that regrettably we will commit in the future are all removed as far as the east is from the west.

How wonderful to be forgiven.

God is the ideal. He is all and He is fully and He is glorious. Why wouldn’t we want to grow deeper in dependency on Him? He is all that we need.

The deeper the roots, the stronger the believer.

I hope you have examined yourself in the light of God’s Word today. Are you growing? Are you growing deeper in discernment – knowing God’s Will? Are you growing deeper in daily walk – doing God’s Will? Are you growing deeper in dependency – trusting God’s perfection?

If you have stopped growing, it may be that you are not truly converted. That is why Paul prays so urgently and persistently for the Colossians . . . and why we must do the same for one another.

It is wonderful to be saved. But we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2.12) because, as Jesus said, it is by our fruit that we are known (Matthew 7.16, 20).

And our fruit is only as good as our root.

The deeper the roots, the stronger the believer.