There is just something awesome, encouraging and deepening that happens when we see God answer prayers in a way only God can do. Sometimes that involves changing hard hearts, sometimes it involves overcoming major problems in Jesus’ Name, sometimes it involves healing, help or direction, sometimes it includes people coming to Christ and other times people growing in Christ. The list is endless, but the effect on those who prayed in faith is similar. It is just really encouraging, makes us want to praise and life feels more significant.

For example, in last week’s worship service teaching we took an extended time to encourage all of us in some of the practical ways we can be a witness for Jesus long before sharing the whole gospel. Right after the second service, someone came up to excitedly share how one of those things had happened to them just that week. They had dropped what they were doing and just had a conversation with a hurting person. They didn’t have all the answers, but just took time to talk with this person. When our person said, “can I pray for you?” the other person said, “I haven’t prayed in 30 years.” “Don’t worry I’ll say the words.” Our person was very encouraged how God used their simple conversation to do something more significant. Listening to this, I was also personally encouraged at how God is always at work around us and doing far more than we can imagine.

That would be good enough, but the story doesn’t end there. About 5 minutes later another person came up to me. “I think you should know about a call that came into the church this morning.” This person was doing nursery and a phone call came in, asking for the BEFC person I just mentioned who dropped what they were doing and simply had a conversation with a hurting person. Our nursery worker told the person on the phone that they didn’t know where that person was at that time and the worship service was going on. So the person phoning said, “Please just thank that person who talked with me – they saved my life.” Since the caller had been battling addiction problems, this was a profound thanks. By now, I am really excited. At the very time I was sharing that God takes our obedient actions & does far more with them – our church was receiving a phone call confirming that very truth. Now how special is that!

In this lifetime, we will see only a small sample of the significant things God is doing with our prayers, our witness, our service and our worship. It is not that they aren’t happening more often, but we just won’t see them until heaven. Like the encouragement I shared last Sunday where 2 people who went to our Pioneer Clubs a decade ago came back to tell our leaders “thanks” for the part they played - we couldn’t see that because they moved. The more we join God in His work through our prayers, service, witness & being available to people, the more we give God to use in His way & His timing. Now we come to v 9-10 in Col. 1. READ v 9-10

PROPOSITION: There is great spiritual power, encouragement and long-range perspective that comes from regularly praying powerful prayers for other Christians, whether we have met them or not.
I. Sometimes it’s tough to **regularly** pray for other Christians

Colossians 1:9a

Here we learn that Paul and Timothy **regularly prayed** for the believers in Colossae – “since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.” If we are honest, for the large majority of us, it is tough to **regularly** and **continually** pray for the same Christians, especially if it is not an emergency. It is not that we don’t pray for others nor is it because we don’t want to pray or don’t believe prayer is important. There are simply some natural obstacles to praying regularly, over and over, for the same people. **What are some of these challenges?**

A. We may not know the people well

One challenge in praying regularly and continually for other Christians is that we may not know the people we are asked to pray for very well – in fact we may have never met them! Someone may ask us to pray for their Aunt Edna because of a problem she is going through – we want to do that – we may even have met Aunt Edna briefly at last year’s Christmas Eve service. But after praying for her current situation we really don’t know what else to pray for her because we don’t know anything else about her. And because we don’t know her very well, she probably won’t naturally pop into our minds so we can pray for her & her situation regularly.

**READ v 9a.** Notice that phrase “since the day we heard about you.” Paul and Timothy have been regularly and continually praying for people they have never personally met but only heard about. They didn’t even have phones, pictures or the internet back then. So what helped Paul and Timothy **regularly** and **continually** pray for people they have never personally met?

We are given a clue at the start of v 9 – “For this reason”. whatever was written before v 9 gives us a key reason that Paul and Timothy regularly and continuously prayed for people they have never met! What is v 3-8 about? **It keeps referring to the good report Paul & Timothy heard about the Colossians** –

- their faith in Jesus, love for God’s people
- their hope in what God is storing up for them in heaven
- how the Colossians heard the gospel and then responded positively to it
- and their spiritual growth in Jesus.

So, hearing clear evidence of God’s work in another person, or situation, helps us pray more people, especially those we don’t know well. In other words, God encourages missionaries, church leaders, Christian media and fellow believers to share the positive things they see God doing, not just to make us feel better, but God also knows those reports will help propel our prayers for people we may never have met. We have lots of opportunities in this here at Barre EFC. Every other month we get 3 letters from pastors & church planters we are helping in Belarus. In your bulletin today is the latest report from Pastor Arthur of what is happening in the churches and community in New Canaan, Haiti – a town that didn’t even exist 10 years ago, Adam Bailey and
the Little open our eyes to what God is doing in Japan, Brig and Chris what God is
doing among first nations people in Canada, and the Barias challenge us with what is
happening in states that hold ½ the population of India. Big pushes to pray don’t just
come from hearing about burdens! God also regularly encourages us to pray more by
giving us glimpses into the mighty things He is doing in response to our past prayers!
AS we’ve regularly prayed for slum kids in India, trafficked girls in Thailand, war
refugees in the Middle East, the starving in Sudan, natural disaster victims in the US,
the persecuted believers in the 10/40 window and AIDS orphans in the Congo, God
has opened our eyes to some special results so we don’t just pray with the heavy
burden of a seemingly impossible situation, but we also pray with a power, hope and
confidence God is going to bring more good out of those awful situations than we can
think or imagine! Praise the Lord!

B. We tend to pray for immediate needs
A second challenge in praying regularly and continually for other Christians is that we
most naturally pray for immediate needs. “I am heading to the hospital. Please pray
they can help.” But what happens when those needs are no longer immediate? Or the
situation stabilizes? What can we pray beyond immediate needs? I love the example
God gives us here. Paul and Timothy’s regular prayer requests come out of the
thanksgiving in v 3-8, but their stated prayers go way beyond the Colossians’
needs. Verses 9-14 contain powerful prayer requests! READ v 9b-12. These prayers
definitely go beyond their immediate needs and the significance of
these requests encourages us to pray more, especially when we see glimpses of God’s
answers to them.

(Hold up Visionary Prayer Requests sheet). For example, we have a little prayer
guide out in the lobby tract rack called VISIONARY PRAYER REQUESTS – don’t
worry that it says 2016, these are visionary so they don’t go out of date. One of those
prayer requests is “Father, we pray for major spiritual breakthroughs in Muslim
people, neighborhoods and countries across the world.” This goes way beyond the
immediate prayers for temporary assistance in that war torn area. Earlier this year, we
received word of how God has initiated 100 new house churches in a small area of a
Middle Eastern country that has not been open to the gospel in our entire lifetime.
That is naturally encouraging to Christians, but having personally prayed for those
major spiritual breakthroughs in Muslim lands for many years, that report
overwhelmed me and brought me to tears. I still don’t have words for how incredible
an answer that is, so I am encouraged, motivated and excited to pray big prayers for
other areas. What a joy to know that I have been a small part of God’s miraculous
work and He is inviting me to join Him in the transformation of other peoples’ lives
and bringing good out of bad situations! Praying big prayers, like are mentioned in
this brochure, helps us recognize more of God’s great work which inspires us to pray
more big prayers!

C. We don’t know what to keep praying
A third challenge in praying regularly and continually for other Christians is that we often don’t know what to KEEP PRAYING ABOUT. What do we pray after the immediate needs; how many times do we need to pray for them? Are there any powerful and significant prayers we can pray for another Christian which are always needed! Ones we can actually see progress in rather than the super general ones like “Lord, please help everyone everywhere”? Absolutely there are! And we see 3 such powerful prayers as we continue in v 9.

II. Powerful prayers we can pray for any Christian — Colossians 1:9b

READ v 9b-10a. The 3 powerful prayers these words inspire …

- Ask God to fill another Christian with the knowledge of His will.
- Ask God to help another Christian have greater wisdom and understanding from the Holy Spirit.
- Ask God to help another Christian live a life worthy of the Lord. Those are some powerful prayers and they are NOT dependent on saying the exact words!

Look back at verse 9 – notice that two different words for prayer are used in this verse. The first word is “pray” (“We have not stopped praying for you”). “Pray” is the most general word for any prayer – it covers requests, praises, thanksgiving, confession, just sharing our heart, whatever. The second word is “ask” (“We continually ask God to”). This refers to a request we specifically want God to act on. As Christians, we get to freely come into the presence of the Almighty and ask God for whatever we want because God has adopted us as His children through Jesus’ death for our sins and bodily resurrection from the dead. We pray freely as a child to the Father. But God is not our butler or a vending machine. The Lord gets to choose HOW to act on our request. If we get upset at His answers then we are acting in a childish way. As followers of Jesus who want to please God, we want to respond in a childlike, not childish way. As children, we can ask big, powerful, significant prayers like these three even though we have no idea how it could happen.

A. Pray for the knowledge of God’s will — (I Thessalonians 4:3-4)

The first powerful prayer here is to pray that another Christian may be FILLED with the knowledge of God’s will. READ v 9b. To fill means to raise the amount of something to near the capacity of what is being filled. “The knowledge of God’s will” is far more than letting a person know which of 2 or 3 options is the better way – that is how Americans tend to use the phrase “knowing God’s will”. “Filling with the knowledge of God’s will” is asking for a deeper, more abiding understanding of who Jesus really is, what He wants and how that is really the best for us. The ‘knowledge of God’s will’ is more than simple insight into how God wants his people to behave at a certain time or place – it is a deepening appreciation of God & His ways

I Thessalonians 4:3-4 clearly states “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified (or holy)” – that is clear – it is God’s will for every one of us here that we be holy. That is broader and more important than any single decision we make and it also
greatly impacts ALL the decisions we make. The passage goes on to give us some specifics of what it means to be sanctified or holy: *that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust.* So we can be absolutely sure it is always “*God’s will*” not to commit adultery, have pre-marital sex, do pornography, have gay or lesbian sex, etc. We also see it is “*God’s will*” for us to learn to control our bodily actions so we don’t give into, or feed, our various lusts like for money, possessions, food, sex, comfort, recognition or achievement. This knowledge of *God’s will* goes even deeper than head knowledge – it is where we begin to get overwhelmed with the great wisdom and incredible value behind everything the true God does!

So let’s say one of your Christian friends falls madly in love with another person and now wants to move in with them – to cohabitate as a couple instead of God’s will to get married first. Now that Christian will then come up with all kinds of reasons why it is OK for them to do that – after all they love each other and it makes them happy. How could God be against that? We, on the other hand, see that the relational pain they will face in the future is not worth any gain they now feel by moving in together – that is how God’s will works. It always provides something good for us and it protects us from something painful. We can pray they will understand this, repent and go back to God’s plan. That’s a great prayer. We can also ADD to that prayer that our Christian friend *“be filled with the knowledge of God’s will.”* That is that they see God’s character more fully, feel His love more deeply, & understand the devastation of un-holiness more clearly. God wants the best for both those people for the long run and they are heading the wrong way. When 2 romantically involved people move in together outside of marriage it actually almost doubles the chance of later divorce if they do get married and it rises their chance of splitting up 5 times higher. Living together teaches people to be on a *performance basis* *(perform or you are out)* not a *coventant basis* which is needed for a lasting marriage. God is not trying to take away pleasure, but give us something deeper and more significant for the long run. God’s wonderful design of marriage is not primarily to make 2 people happy, but to literally provide for a better future for society, kids & each spouse especially when they are older. The knowledge of God’s will fills us with this incredible amazement & appreciation of how well thought out God’s plan really is.

**B. Pray for wisdom and understanding from the HS**

V 9 clearly tells us this bigger picture of “*God’s will*” comes through “*the wisdom and understanding that the Holy Spirit gives.*” READ v 9b. So we can also pray for another Christian to receive wisdom and understanding from the Holy Spirit. We have God’s wisdom in the Bible, in Biblical teaching, in Christian writing & lyrics, in examples from church history, in the lives of godly examples around us, yet all of that can just bounce off a person. It can get discouraging to keep praying for the weakness of a fellow Christian and not see any change. But in praying this bigger, more powerful prayer for God to continue to give that struggling Christian wisdom and understanding from the Holy Spirit, we are praying something far more significant.
that changing a simple action. Should they not listen to God in that one area, but we see them clearly understanding Jesus’ counter-cultural ways and taking a God honoring step in another area of life, then we can be encouraged, even as this other discouraging action continues because we see evidence of them understanding the greatness of God’s will in another area.

C. Pray they will act to live a life worthy of the Lord
A third powerful prayer we can pray for people is that they will take actual steps, or actions, to live a life worthy of the Lord. READ 9-10a. There are actually 4 goals of these powerful prayers for other Christians given to us in v 10 and we will deal with those in more detail next week. The first goal of our “big prayers” is that a Christian may take action and put effort into living a life worthy of the Lord. So we can pray that specifically – again the exact words are not important. This is speaking about our conduct. Some of your translations use the word “walk” here instead of “live a life”. This picture goes back to the Old Testament where the word “walk” symbolically referred to one’s conduct. Biblically, knowledge and conduct were bound together. In their eyes, a person doesn’t “know” something if they did not do it. If you don’t do something then you don’t know that truth. That is why how you are living (or how you walk) is so closely connected to what you know or believe. True spiritual knowledge means action! As our understanding and appreciation of the greatness of God’s character, commands & plan grows, that naturally encourages us to put more of our effort into living a Christ pleasing life in reliance of Jesus’ power.

In just a couple minutes, after we pray & sing, we are going to take part in communion together where we focus on the core of our faith – Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins and His bodily resurrection from the dead. Use this time to just to think about how much Jesus gave up to carry out this plan and how incredibly transforming it is for any who believe, repent and surrender! May we continually grow in our knowledge of God’s will!

III. Some goals of powerful prayer (more detail on this point next Sunday) Colossians 1:10
A. Live a life worthy of the Lord
B. Please God in every way
C. Have positive results from all good work
D. Grow in the Knowledge of God