Strength We Get From God
Colossians 1:11

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, it makes us want to praise God! Life feels more significant.

Every summer we go back to a short New Testament letter. We go at a “slower pace” than usual - just doing 1-3 verses a week. The part many like is this allows me to go into more depth on a topic mentioned in the book while also being about 15% shorter in length. I can do that because the next week, I simply pick up with where I left off the previous week. So this year we pick up with Colossians 1:11. READ.

This verse is in the middle of a description of what the apostle Paul prays for those in the new church in the city of Colossae. Back in Jesus’ day Colossae was an ancient city in the country of Phrygia in Asia Minor. That’s in modern day Turkey today. The city’s importance was beginning to decline at this time and there were a lot false religious cults rising up – especially ones that claimed special hidden knowledge – or what we call gnostic beliefs. Paul had never been to the Colossian church, but in different letter said he wanted to go there after he got out of jail.

Now the apostle Paul had learned some incredible lessons about the power of prayer. Do you realize that is the privilege of every follower of Jesus Christ can have, not just Christian leaders, Christian superstars or prayer warriors. Our prayers are not dependent on knowing secret words, having to pray a certain amount of time, having a “professional” pray for us or doing some special religious rituals. We simply pray as a child to the Father. God adopts us into His family when we come to faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins and bodily rose from the dead! Since we have already admitted our sinfulness & unworthiness, we simply pray as a young child to the Father – we share what is on our hearts without any effort to manipulate, figure things out ahead of time or find the right moment. At first, our requests tend to focus on ourselves & loved ones. But as we grow spiritually, we learn more of the heart & plan of God. Our prayers get bigger and we really do want God’s Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

So what does the apostle Paul pray for a church he has never been to? What does he pray for fellow Christians he has never personally met? Starting in Colossians 1:9, Paul reveals he is earnestly praying that they may be (1) filled with the knowledge of God’s will, (2) that they can have greater wisdom and understanding from the Holy Spirit, (3) that they may live a life worthy of Jesus and (4) that spiritual long term benefits will come through their efforts for Jesus. To keep doing these things is hard. There are so many challenges we face. We cannot do
them by our effort alone – we need additional power. Rather than simply pray that difficulties and problems will all disappear, Paul regularly prays that his fellow-believers may be strengthened with the power of God so they can respond differently because of their faith. The confidence Paul has that God will answer these type of prayers is incredible, especially since Paul himself is in jail, without any physical resources and unable to personally help! We need the power of God in our church and the local churches around us. We need the power of God in our lives no matter what age we are, what situation we face, what people are around us or what country we live in. Let’s look more deeply into that – READ v 9-11.

PROPOSITION: The Lord strengthens us with His power so we may have greater endurance and patience as we represent Jesus in a broken, sin-filled world.

I. God wants to develop/grow our endurance and patience in this broken world

Power is an interesting thing. We need power to overcome obstacles, control sinful desires, help others, and carry out responsibilities. When our bodies completely run out of power, we die unless there is outside artificial help. While power is necessary to move forward, it is also one of the items in life that corrupts us most easily. As our cultural proverb says, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” To counter the naturally corrupting effect of power in the church, or in our own lives, it’s very important (and most helpful) to understand WHY God wants to give us additional power in our lives. We find that reason at the end of v 11. READ v 11. The words “so that” confirms that developing greater “endurance and patience” is definitely what God wants His power to produce in our lives!

There is one other word outside of v 11 which may be part of v 11. Since the early manuscripts of the New Testament contain almost no punctuation, it is impossible to tell whether the word “joyful” goes with giving thanks in v 12 or with ‘endurance and patience’ in verse 11. Since 12 is a continuation of the same sentence, it makes little overall difference. There is a joy that accompanies this endurance and patience as well as our giving thanks to God the Father when we experience God’s supernatural power. We will touch on the joy part next week.

A. That allows us to continue despite the obstacles/difficult people

God gives us additional power in our lives so that we may have “great endurance”. “Endurance” is “the ability to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances.” The kind of steadfastness, stamina and fortitude that is meant here is that which “enables one to hold their position in battle.” In light of the destructive forces towards true Christianity in this area, Paul is praying that they would stand … endure … persevere … remain steadfast … stay with it. It is tempting for Christians to want to quit when our circumstances become difficult. Most times in life, it is not talent or training that guarantees victory: but it is perseverance. As Charles Spurgeon used to point out, “It was by perseverance that the snails reached the ark.” This is not some stoic, teeth-gritting endurance, but has some joy in it – great endurance “with
joy”. It is what Paul and Silas combined as they sang hymns to God as they sat chained (and in pain) from beatings there in the Philippian jail. (Acts 16:25).

B. That allows us calmness in the presence of obstacles/difficult people
To “endurance” Paul adds “patience,” or as the Greek more literally says, “long-suffering.” (By the way some of your versions will use other words like ‘patience and long-suffering’) This second word includes “self-restraint” and is the opposite of revenge. Patience also describes “a state of emotional calm in the face of provocation or misfortune and without complaining or irritation.” Patience is enduring something tedious without getting upset or remaining calm when someone is taking forever or remaining peaceful when trying to teach someone something over and over which they just don’t get. God gives us more of His power so we can be more patient. What God asks us to do, He also empowers! God doesn’t just develop patience through difficult circumstances, but also by pouring out more of His power into our lives and situations!

It is at this point that a number of commentaries try to distinguish endurance (the first word) from patience (the second word) by saying endurance is needed for difficult circumstances, while patience is what is needed for difficult people. Endurance is bearing up in an apparently impossible situation, while patience is long-suffering towards an apparently impossible person. It is wise to have a bit of caution when you hear such sweeping statements about words that are so close in meaning. The two words actually can each refer to both situations. Neither circumstances nor people are to upset the person who walks in the will and power of God.

C. God provides us greater strength to enable us to develop these
Notice that it is not just endurance and patience God wants to develop by unleashing more and more of His power in our lives, but it is “great endurance and patience”! God isn’t training us to just get by but to excel in these areas. Endurance and patience are important qualities to live in a broken world without becoming unglued by all its panics and crises. And remember that Christian joy is probably part of all this! As one Christian scholar rightly observed, ‘If joy is not rooted in the soil of suffering, it is shallow.’ It is easy to be joyful when things go well; “but Christian radiance is something which all the shadows of life can never quench.”

If your goal in this life is to never have to deal with another challenging person then you will not grow strong spiritually. If you feel the only “good life” now is if you don’t have to face any more major problems then you are not going to experience God’s supernatural power. God is gracious. He gives us times of rest, breaks from difficult people and times where there is little conflict around us. But when difficult circumstances or people come into our lives don’t immediately assume that God is displeased with you or you are doing something wrong. Instead, trust that God is going to strengthen you with greater power – power that comes from His glorious might. READ v 11. Notice this is exceeding power in every way!
The Lord wants to develop greater endurance and patience in every one of us so that all of eternity is richer and so we can go through this life’s difficulties differently. When we are growing in endurance and patience, God can give us more & more of His power without it corrupting us. Maybe we need to come up with a different way to respond when asked how we are doing when overwhelmed by difficult situations or difficult people. Instead of saying we are miserable because everything or everybody seems to be against us, maybe we should respond with “God seems to be developing my endurance and patience – I can’t wait to experience more of His power in my life!” Then add a little smile on our face! God does NOT expect us to get stronger on our own, but He will powerfully pour out more of His power in our lives!

II. Some ways God strengthens us

READ v 11. So what are some ways that God strengthens us “with all power according to His glorious might”? We usually think of God’s glorious power in those truly amazing, miraculous outward events – like the opening of the Red Sea for the Israelites, or fire coming down from heaven for Elijah or raising someone bodily from the dead. But there is other power from God – just as glorious and just as amazing – which the Lord provides for His people – including everyday people!!! As Proverbs 16:32 says, “Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.” The one who is slow to anger is greater than the physically strongest person and one who exercises self-control is greater than the one who always wins!

A. Strength from the Holy Spirit inside

One place we see God’s awesome power is through the direct work of the Holy Spirit inside us. The way I have personally experienced goes something like this. I receive discouraging and overwhelming bad news over a period of time. After my mind goes through all the perceived possibilities, I can’t see any good that will come out of this bad news. All I can see is that my life is going to get a lot harder & tougher for me and there is nothing that I can do about it. I feel weak and helpless. I just want to hide or run away. Then though prayer, time & the scriptures a new strength & new perspective starts to rise up in me. I feel inner strength & perspective rising up so it doesn’t matter if I win or lose, can see how things will get better or even have any idea what to do. There is a literal boldness and courage that rises up from my helplessness when nothing on the outside has changed at all – in fact things usually have gotten worse and look even more hopeless. God literally gives us strength from the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We get renewed energy and a new focus so we can move forward again in life.

B. Strength from seeing God’s amazing work (fuels faith)

A second place we see God’s awesome power is seeing God do what only God can do around us. This doesn’t involve us directly, but it is what we see God do in another person’s life. Many decades ago I watched as the marriage of a couple I knew fell apart completely! Nothing helped. Finally one of the spouses left and later became engaged to another person. Now the engaged spouse who left was coming back with
the final divorce papers, but the other spouse didn’t want that & was praying that God would give them another chance to work things out. I prayed with them and encouraged them not to think about the poor possibilities of that happening, but simply to ask God, do what is right & then leave the results to Him. The most amazing thing happened – the engaged spouse who left reconciled that night, broke off the new relationship & engagement and they started working things out together. Humanly speaking the situation was totally hopeless, yet God’s power broke through to a heart and that person listened, surrendered and reconciliation started. Having seen God do that miracle in another person’s life has empowered me since then with a greater confidence and boldness in seemingly impossible situations. God’s miraculous work in other peoples’ lives strengthens my life with the power of God!

C. Strength from God’s servants whom He empowers

A third place we see God’s power is when we realize all the ways God works through His servants to help us. There are too many times in my life where another person has come at just the right time, said just the right words, had just the right resources to do what I thought couldn’t be done for all that to just be chance or coincidences. Then they say something like, “I wasn’t going to bring this, or go this way or talk to you, but something inside just moved me to do that.” Wow! God strengthens and empowers others to do that which they would not ordinarily do to help others. I get so excited about that. God’s power didn’t just empower the other person, but it now empowers me also – not that my life will be easy or everything will be fine, but that Jesus is right with me and actively working to bring good to His children.

Then I think about all the angels around us – divine beings much stronger than we are who are quietly helping and ministering to us. Now we are not to try to communicate with these spirits, nor can we trust our emotions as to whether they were good or bad spirits – satan himself can appear like “an angel of light”. But just the idea of God’s guardian angels around me, helping me, alerting me, keeping me from destruction is incredibly strengthening to me personally.

III. God’s Power is Limitless

It doesn’t matter where you look – God is regularly empowering His followers with more and more of His power. READ v 11. God’s glorious, mighty power makes it possible for believers to be steadfast, patient, and, as we will tackle next week, joyful. Isn’t that incredible! The harder life becomes for you or the more your patience is stretched or the weaker you feel, the more God wants to empower you with additional strength! God’s power is limitless. But He gives us His power with a purpose so it doesn’t corrupt us! Transforming the positive character traits that will make eternity (& even this life) far richer for us is God’s priority. Developing our character is far more important than recognition, possessions, temporal freedom or health.

A pastor often visited a Christian young man who had been badly burned. The young man had to lie still for hours. It was difficult for him to do even the simplest functions of life. “I
wish God would do a miracle and heal me," the young man sighed to his pastor one day. (A perfectly fine prayer from a child to the Father – as long as we are willing to trust God’s answer and not throw a temper-tantrum when God answers different than we want.)

“God is doing a miracle,” the pastor replied, “but not the kind you are looking for. I have watched you grow in patience and kindness during these weeks. That, to me, is a greater miracle than the healing of your body.”

Life is often difficult and challenging in this broken world. At times, our circumstances are far from friendly. In those times we need endurance—the ability to pass through any experience and trust God to see us through. God literally gives us some of His strength so we can endure. At other times, people around us are far from friendly. In those times we need patience—the capacity to be long-suffering with people and not retaliate when we feel we have been wronged or irritated. God literally gives us more of His strength so we can be patient. From experience most of us know that staying steadfast through tough circumstances and being patient with people is tough stuff. It’s often beyond our ability. Let’s keep yielding ourselves to God in trust and obedience, then use the power He gives us to continue to endure and be patient with joy!