

And Now, Finally, In Conclusion...

Parting Prayers From A Departing Pastor

“That You May Please Him In Every Way”

Colossians 1:9-14

Change is in the air! You can taste it, can't you? Things are going to be different around here. Things are going to be different for you. Things are going to be different for me.

Next Sunday when I stand up to preach, I won't be speaking to a bunch of people I know—people whom I've help to lead to Christ, united in marriage, baptized their babies and buried their loved ones.

For the most part, I will be speaking to a group of strangers, to people who don't know anything about me, to people with whom I have no relationship at all. And, frankly, that's a little bit scary. It's kind of like you are starting all over again in ministry.

And when you come to church next Sunday things are going to be quite different for you. There will be a new pastor introduced. He won't be an Irishman. He won't have a Southern Indiana accent. He'll be a different kind of leader. He'll have different kinds of gifts. He'll have different mannerisms and habits and passions. Worship may have a different feel at first.

Some people fear change. I mean when anything deviates from the normal in their lives, they just can't handle it. I'm reminded of that little old lady who stood up in the middle of a lecture that **Dr. Werner Von Braun** was giving and said to the gifted scientist, the father of the US space program, *“Why can't we forget about all these new-fangled ideas about going out into space and be content to stay at home and watch television like the good Lord intended?”*

Some folks just have a hard time with change. In the very first church where I served as pastor there was a godly old man by the name of **Ralph Pace** who served on the Official Board who used to love to say with a gleam in his eye, *“Pastor Murphy, I'm all for progress. It's just change that I don't like.”*

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Now he was being facetious. But there are a lot of people in this world who do have a difficult time with change. But here's my challenge to you on my final Sunday here as your pastor: **Don't fear change—Embrace it!**

During these last few weeks with you, I have been calling your attention to some prayers that Paul prayed for the church in his day. They are found in what are commonly referred to as his *Prison Epistles* or *Prison Letters*—four books of the Bible, **Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.**

Paul was incarcerated in a Roman prison for preaching and teaching about Jesus Christ. He knew he was going to eventually be executed. He knew that his next moment might very well be his last. And so one of the things he does while he is in prison is to pray for the members of the church. Although they are out of sight they are not out of mind.

And as I have thought about and prayed about and reflected upon what this change in my life is going to mean for you and for me, I have been drawn to pray for you these very same prayers which Paul prayed for the members of the church in his day. God has reminded me again and again that the best thing I can do for you at this point in my life is pray for you.

And so I have entitled this series of sermons, **And Now, Finally, In Conclusion... Parting Prayers From A Departing Pastor.** Now the prayer to which I want to call your attention to this morning is a prayer that Paul prayed for the church at **Colossae** and it is found in the book of **Colossians**, the **1st chapter**, beginning with **verse 9.**

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the

kingdom of light.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
Colossians 1:9-14

This prayer is all about growth and change. In fact, right in the middle of this prayer you will find Paul crying out to God that these believers in the church at Colossae will be *“growing in the knowledge of God.”*

This was a young church. There were a lot of new believers. Some of them were not very well established yet in the Christian faith. Their theology was all messed up. They had fallen prey to some false teaching. They weren't fully convinced yet of the adequacy of Jesus Christ to meet all of their needs.

And so Paul prays that they may truly grow in Jesus Christ. That's precisely my prayer for you. Yes, change is in the air. But the time of change is also a time for the possibility of growth. And so I want to pray for you just as Paul prayed for the Colossians, *“That you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way.”* And one of the ways we please Him is when we truly embrace growth in our lives.

And so I leave you with a prayer for **knowledge**, *“That you may know him better”* (Ephesians 1:17 NIV); a prayer for the establishment and expression of **love** in your life, that you may be *“rooted and established in love”* (Ephesians 3:17 NIV); and a prayer for **growth**, so that you *“may please him in every way”* (Colossians 1:10 NIV).

Paul celebrates the fact that God has begun a new work in the lives of these believers at Colossae. He says as he begins this letter, *“(I)... have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints”* (Colossians 1:4 NIV).

And Paul is convinced, as he said in another place, *“that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 1:6 NIV)... if we allow Him to truly reign in

our hearts and lives, and are continually open and submissive to His will.

Here's the good news of the gospel—**God will not give up on you!** I have never been very skilled with my hands—to construct things and repair things and create things. Linda's Dad and her older brother were both very handy making things and fixing things and wiring things and welding things...and she just thought that every man had these innate skills. And then she married me!

Wow! What a surprise for her. Now I can change a light bulb and I'm really good at taking out the trash; but when it comes to anything that demands a lot of intricate skill with your hands, I'm as doomed as the Titanic!

When I was growing up, it was the golden age of model airplanes and model ships and model cars. Some of my friends were really good at that, so I decided I would buy one of those model kits and build me a ship—an aircraft carrier.

I remember being really excited as I opened the box. I looked inside and all of these pieces fell out—hundreds and hundreds of pieces—and I began to read the instructions and began to see just how much effort, how much work, this was going to be. I wasn't really discouraged at first, but the more and more I got into it the more and more I realized how difficult it was going to be to finish the job.

Not only did I have to put everything together; not only did I have to use modeling glue; but I also had decals to put on and all of this paint to apply. It was all a bit overwhelming. And you probably guessed this, but I never finished the job. In fact, not once in my life have I ever finished putting a model together.

I even bought some models for my son when I became a father. I thought I would help him do it. But guess what! I never had what it took to even help him finish putting together a model car or boat or plane.

Do you know what I'm thankful for? I'm thankful for the fact that when our lives become difficult, when it seems we have nowhere else to go,

when it seems that our lives are just messed up, I'm thankful that God doesn't just put us on a shelf and stops working on us.

No, if we allow Him to, God will always finish the job. So here's what God's Word says to us in **1st Peter 2:2**. ***“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation”*** (NIV).

God wants you to grow. God wants you to mature. God wants you to ***“be conformed to the likeness of his Son”*** (Romans 8:29 NIV). I mean babies are cute. Babies are treasured. Babies are adorable. But you know and I know if you've ever been a parent or a grandparent that babies aren't always pleasant to be around.

Someone has described babies like this: ***“A baby is a digestive apparatus with a loud noise at one end and no responsibility at the other.”*** Babies are notoriously selfish and self-centered. When they're not happy they cry. Their whole world is centered around themselves. That is all they think about. That is all they know.

And part of a parent's task is to help them grow, to help them know how to get along with other people, to help them know that the world does not revolve around their every need and want and whim, to help them learn to be patient and kind and giving.

As much as we loved our babies, Linda and I wanted them to grow and mature and develop into mature human beings. And so it is with our spiritual lives. God wants us to grow. It pleases Him when He sees us mature and develop and become established in the faith. And so all through the New Testament we are encouraged in one form or another to ***“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”*** (2nd Peter 3:18 NIV).

In fact, one of the great weaknesses of the Christian church today is that so many Christians in so many churches just never grow up. They remain spiritual babies all of their lives. They just settle down and never grow, never mature, never get beyond a “me first” attitude in life. And, frankly, that's what turns a lot of people away from the church.

They come looking for life and find this dead thing that looks and acts and operates like every other organization in the world. One man, a Scottish preacher and hymn writer by the name of **Horatius Bonr**, put it like this: ***“I looked for the church and I found it in the world; I looked for the world and I found it in the church.”***

Nothing undermines our testimony more than the fruit of spiritual immaturity.

And so, I pray ***“that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power so that you may have great endurance and patience.”***

The “fruit” that Paul talks about here is the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

So what's the secret to experiencing this growth? Being open and submissive to God! That is the secret to spiritual power, development and growth. Let me read a verse of Scripture for you that I just recently “discovered” as I have been studying the Bible about this matter of prayer.

As many times as I have read the Bible, I don't remember ever reading this verse. I'm sure it was there. I just missed it. My mind must have been on autopilot. It is a verse about Jesus and it occurs in the **5th chapter** of the book of **Hebrews**, the **7th verse**.

This is how it reads. ***“During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission”*** (NIV). Let me just underscore that last phrase. ***“He was heard because of his reverent submission.”***

That's the secret to spiritual power. Someone has put it like this: **When all that you are is available to all that God is, than all that God is available to all that you are.”**

Jesus said one time, ***“I seek not to please myself but him who sent me”*** (John 5:30 NIV). Reverent submission! That’s the key!

So let me leave you with a little prayer you can pray every day that will stimulate spiritual growth and maturity in your life. I didn’t write this prayer. I didn’t create it. I have just borrowed it from a New York Yankee baseball player, of all people—**Bobby Richardson**, their all star 2nd baseman for so many years.

Here’s the prayer and I encourage you to pray it every day. ***“Dear God, Your will! Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen.”***