

## Leader Notes

**Text:** Colossians 1.9-14

### *Intimacy*

#### **Context and Background**

**Background:** The letter to the church in Colossae was written by Paul and his protégé Timothy (Colossians 1.1). Paul and Timothy were not the founding pastors of this church. In all likelihood, the two had never been to Colossae. Rather, the church in Colossae had been founded by a man named Epaphras (Colossians 1.7). More than likely, Epaphras was disciplined by Paul during his ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19). It is possible that during this time part of Paul's ministry was to send church planters out into the surrounding areas of Asia Minor (See the accusation against Paul in Acts 19.26). Because this church was founded by one connected to Paul, he felt an obligation to shepherd and pray for them from a distance, something Paul seems to have done with other churches in Asia Minor as well (Colossians 4.16). This desire to maintain a pastoral connection with the church in Colossae is what gave rise to this letter.

**Context:** Having not founded the church in Colossae nor having met the people of the city, Paul set out to write with Timothy a letter to the church. Paul rarely wrote apart from necessity. That is, Paul only wrote when he felt issues had arisen in a church that needed to be addressed. In reading the letter of Colossians, it seems that the church was struggling with an early form of Gnostic thought, a second-century Christian heresy that struggled with issues of the deity/humanity of Jesus as well as the gaining of sacred or divine knowledge as the pathway to redemption. Perhaps Epaphras felt that he needed Paul's weight and authority to address the situation. Thus he has informed Paul, in person or by letter, of the church and its situation (Colossians 1.3-6). In response, Paul and Timothy address the church in Colossae, reminding them of the great supremacy of Jesus, both His divinity and humanity, and how a relationship with Jesus impacts one's everyday life. In the present passage, Paul and Timothy offer a prayer for the Colossian believers, a prayer that focuses on them coming to know God and His will in an intimate manner. It is through this knowledge of God and His will that one finds the power and ability to live the Christian life.

#### **The Text**

**Knowing God (Colossians 1.9):** Paul and Timothy write that they have been in constant prayer for the believers in Colossae. Their prayer is motivated by the growth in faith and love that is present in the church at Colossae. The prayer Paul and Timothy are praying is quite simple. They are asking that God would fill them with the knowledge of His will. That is, that God would fill them with wisdom and spiritual understanding. At first blush the prayer reads as if Paul and Timothy are asking for God to impart intellectual knowledge about what God desires. Certainly intellectual understanding is implied. However, Paul and Timothy are writing against a Jewish background that implies more than intellectual understanding. In the Old Testament, wisdom and knowledge were given by God. What is interesting is that wisdom and knowledge were understood to be gained through an experiential knowledge of God. That is, it was in an experiential relationship with God that one gained an understanding of what God wanted (See Proverbs 9.10). Further, to understand what God wanted was viewed in the Old Testament as a pathway to knowing who God was and is (See Psalm 103.7-12). Basically, to ask for God to impart the knowledge of His will was to ask that the Colossian believers have an experiential relationship with God Himself. Paul and Timothy are praying that the Colossian believers would come to know God, to know Him in an intimate and relational way.

**Knowing God and a worthy life (Colossians 1.10-14):** The prayer of Paul and Timothy technically ends with verse 9 giving way to the desired results of their prayer. Paul and Timothy are praying that the Colossian believers would have an experiential relationship with God so that they might live a worthy life. In Paul and Timothy's mind, knowing God led to the power and ability to live as God desired His people to live. This life involved the bearing of fruit (right and good actions), a greater understanding of God (right understanding), strengthened patience and endurance (right attitude), and the giving of joyful thanks (right response to God). These actions and attitudes comprised a life that pleased God, one that was fitting (worthy) of God's redemptive action on behalf of His people. The basic logic of Paul and Timothy's thought is that knowing God leads to an understanding of God's will and the power to do it. The knowledge of God's will and the power to do it leads to a worthy and pleasing life, one in keeping with the redemptive movement of God in the person of Jesus. Basically, Paul and Timothy chart out their understanding of spiritual transformation, the way God's people become and live as He intends them to live. The foundation of transformation is an experiential relationship with God, intimacy or being with God. This fits well with Jesus' own understanding of transformation found in John 15.1-17. In John, Jesus stated that the bearing of fruit and the glorifying of God came and was based upon remaining with God, an intimate and experiential relationship of being.

**Application:** How does a follower of Christ live a life that is pleasing to God? In our modern context, the answer often given is to try harder. The message heard from many pulpits today is that God expects more and we can do better. Honestly, we just don't have the will or the strength to do any better. Others argue that prayer is the path. This fits with Paul's approach. Paul prays for the Colossians to live a worthy life. What are we to pray? We often pray for transformation. We ask God, sometimes beg and plead, that He change us, that He give us the power and strength to be different. It is interesting that Paul and Timothy do not pray for transformation. They pray for relationship. They ask for a personal encounter with God by the Colossians that would empower and embolden them to live transformed lives. They prayed for a relationship. Perhaps this is where we can begin as well. Perhaps transformation is found first and foremost with a relationship, in a knowing not of what we should be but in a knowing of God Himself. Perhaps in prayer we are first and foremost to experience intimacy with God. Through this intimacy and encounter, a being with God, we find the strength and power to become and live.

# Prayer: Brings God into Life

## Discussion Guide 2

### Colossians 1.9-14

#### Note to leaders:

This guide is a little different than what you are used to experiencing. This guide is designed to build upon the sermon by leading groups to slow down and just be intimate with God in prayer. Working through this guide will not feel comfortable for many of your group members. As a culture, we are not used to slowing down to “be intimate” with God. Encourage your group before you start by acknowledging that this study is different, a study that is a practical application. Consider reading the paragraph below out loud as a way of preparing people’s hearts. Be sure to debrief afterward to see how people are feeling and what they learned.

**Setting the Stage:** *A life, a worthy and pleasing life, one that is transformed from what is to what should be, a life that leaves a legacy, that is marked by the right attitudes and responses to God, a life marked by God’s power and Spirit. How we long for this life. How we strive for it. How it eludes us. We find ourselves living, just not the life we long for, that worthy life. We find that despite our best efforts, despite our most fervent prayers this worthy life, a transformed life seems just beyond our reach. We continue to trip up, continue to fall short. The pride, selfishness, brokenness, busyness that dries us up and washes us out is no less a draw upon us today than it was yesterday. Is life, a worthy life even possible? If so, how do we get there? Maybe we don’t get there from here. Maybe it isn’t found in striving or even in begging. Maybe the very reason a worthy life eludes us is precisely because of our striving and pleading. Maybe, just maybe, it is a whole lot simpler. Maybe a worthy life begins with being, not with our doing but with our being, our being with God. Could it be that in the ceasing of our striving, with the ending of our pleas for transformation, a stilling of ourselves in order to be, to be with God, that for which we long comes and does so naturally? It sounds too simplistic, too unrealistic. Intimacy with God cannot be the path, and yet we have tried everything else. What if we pulled back and reconsidered, reconsidered and reconnected, reconnected with God, reconnecting by being, just being intimate with Him?*

- As the leader, instruct your group to close their eyes and put themselves in the presence of God. Have them imagine that God is present with them. Give them a few minutes to tell God honestly how they are feeling, where they are emotionally and spiritually at the moment. After speaking and acknowledging where they are, encourage your members to still themselves to hear from God.
- Read Colossians 1.9-14 out loud, slowly allowing the words to resonate and settle in the hearts of your group. Have them linger on words or phrases that catch their attention. This takes several minutes. Have them view this as a word of God to them. (Allow for group members to share the word or phrase that came to them.)
- Read Colossians 1.9-14 again in the same way as before. Have your group listen to where their word or phrase connects to their life right now. Have the group enter that scene in their imagination. Envision the scene for several minutes. Pay careful attention to what you hear and experience. (Allow for group members to share their experience.)
- Read Colossians 1.9-14 once more, having group members listen attentively. In what ways is God speaking through His Word, inviting them to respond. Allow several minutes for a prayer of response. Encourage members not to censure their thoughts or requests, but let them flow spontaneously and freely before a loving God. (Allow the group to share their responses with one another.)
- Read Colossians 1.9-14 once more. Have your group members rest in God’s presence and love. Allow time for group members to rest and wait before reentering life as usual. What words, phrases, or thoughts do they wish to take with them as they move out of this time? (Allow time for members to share these with one another.)

#### Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- Prayer requests
- Group Prayer time
- House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)