

# Christ in Me

## Formed in Christ

January 18, 2026

Colossians 1:9-14

## Introduction

**(Title Slide)** My friend Shane is a Dean and Professor at a university in Kentucky. We met in Louisville, KY and earned our doctorates together. During one of our seminars, Shane shared with the group that his wife was pregnant with their second child, and that—due to a genetic issue—there was a 1 in 4 chance their child would be born with a challenging or debilitating genetic disorder.

Before we could pray for Shane and his family, he went on to share what he had recently learned about God, prayer, and himself through this situation. Just days prior, Shane had asked another pastor-friend to pray about the same situation. And, trying to hold back tears, Shane explained, “He certainly prayed for all to be healthy, but above all, he prayed that God would make us holy.” It was a prayer that completely caught him off guard, revealing in part some of his underlying assumptions about God and his faith in Him.<sup>1</sup>

**(SLIDE)** It raises the question: ***If you could listen in on someone praying for you, what would you hope to hear?*** Like Shane, most of us might want prayers for the things that make life a little easier—good health, success at school or work, peace in our relationships, or just enough strength to make it through a stressful week. Those are good, honest prayers. We all need God’s help with the daily burdens we carry.

But imagine listening in on someone who prays for you in a different way—not just for your circumstances to change, but for ***you*** to be changed. Someone who prays that you would come to know God more deeply, that your character would become stronger than your situation, that your desires would begin to line up with His will. Someone praying not merely for your comfort, but for your formation.

**(SLIDE)** This, in effect, is what we find in Paul’s prayer for the Colossians in verses 9-14. ***It is a prayer that the church would be formed in Christ.*** And while I do not have adequate time this morning to walk through everything in this prayer today, my goal this morning is to help us grasp the main components, to understand the basis for such a prayer, and then to be encouraged to pray this way for one another and for Beech Haven.

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<sup>1</sup> See Nancy Guthrie’s *I’m Praying for You* for more on the subject related to praying for someone suffering.

# Body

## Filled

The first thing I want you to notice is that Paul prays that the church will be filled with the knowledge of God's will. Look at the second part of verse 9.

***We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ...***

Paul's prayer goes far beyond the idea of simply having more information about God. Information is certainly included, but the prayer is actually about transformation. **Paul's ask is that we would be thoroughly influenced, guided, and motivated by who God is and what God has revealed about Himself, so much so that His will—not our own preferences—becomes the driving force of our choices and character.** This is a prayer that you and I would be **inwardly transformed by a divine insight that shapes every part of life,** and we experience that when we are FILLED with the knowledge of his will.

Underline the word "**FILLED.**" Paul understood that many believers are likely to operate at a **spiritual caloric deficit.** He understood the temptation all believers face to drift or coast in our walk with Jesus. We think the early lessons of faith are enough and we become complacent in our faith. Worse, we become indifferent to the results of a shallow faith that is vulnerable to every cultural wind.

It's the same temptation that a college junior on a full ROTC scholarship feels when he or she receives their assignment for the first few years after college. Once that assignment comes down, the GPA requirements one had to keep for their academic scholarship goes away, and typically, so do the student's grades.

Paul understood how this could happen spiritually, especially in a young church that was feeling pretty good about itself. So he prayed that they would not **coast**. He prayed they would not **drift**. He prayed that they would think deeply, ask good questions, and seek to know God well enough to trust and obey Him fully. The prayer is that we be **FORMED in Christ**. Holiness and faithfulness come when we are "**filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.**"

There are two questions we should ask at this point. What does that answered prayer look like and "How will it get answered?" Both are answered in more detail in Colossians 2-3. So hang tight. But the "HOW" part of that I'd like to touch on now.

When we think of growing spiritually ... of being filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ... usually the first place we go in our minds is the **personal**

**practices** or disciplines of our spiritual lives. And to an extent, we are right to do so. We need to cultivate godly habits and personal holiness.

(Slide) But as we'll see in Colossians and as you see in other places in the Bible, ***the personal practice of spiritual disciplines is only meaningful insofar as they are connected to a corporate gathering of Christ-followers.*** You and I can only effectively gauge our growth (the growth that Paul is praying for) in connection with others desiring the same. For spiritual formation to thrive ... for Paul's prayer to be answered ... we must view the corporate gathering and the activities of the local church as indispensable. The biblical message of the church is very clear on this – **the local gathering of God's people is the primary place that we are formed in God's people.**<sup>2</sup>

And yet, for a variety of reasons, we've drifted to see faith as a private pursuit rather than a shared journey. (Slides, as I say them)

1. **We live in a culture that prizes autonomy and self-reliance.** We've been taught that success—and even spirituality—is measured by what *I* can do on my own, rather than what we can become together.
2. **Personal devotion seems more controllable than community life.** Reading our Bible or praying alone doesn't involve the potential messiness and accountability that come with relationships.
3. **We fear vulnerability.** True spiritual growth in community requires transparency, confession, and humility—things we often resist.
4. **Busyness isolates us.** It feels easier to focus on private disciplines than to invest time and emotional energy into meaningful relationships within the body.
5. **We misunderstand maturity.** We sometimes think spiritual maturity means independence, when in reality, biblical maturity is interdependence—bearing each other's burdens and growing together into Christ.

In the end, our overemphasis on individualism weakens the very thing Christ died to create—a family of faith where we are shaped, stretched, and strengthened together. If Paul's prayer in v. 9 is going to be answered, our personal discipline plays a role, but not more than doing life together in the local church.

## Fruitful

Paul's prayer moves naturally from knowing God's will to *living it out* in v. 10. Look at it with me.

***“ ... so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God ...”***

True knowledge of God reshapes daily life—our attitudes, actions, and relationships. The forgiveness and inheritance we've received in Christ should overflow into mercy, generosity, and

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<sup>2</sup> Derived from Coleman Ford, *Formed in His Image*, 109-136.

love. A life that bears no fruit calls into question the vitality of its root. Just as a healthy tree naturally produces an abundance of good fruit, so a spiritually healthy believer demonstrates the reality of faith through a harvest of good works.

Paul understood a danger among believers: **hearing the truth but not acting on it.** In his classic book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman warns that because of our heavy consumption of media and stories and events that we can do virtually nothing about, we have developed what he calls a “low information-action ratio” that we inevitably apply to other things we hear and could act on.

The way this works with our faith goes like this - we read the Bible ... we hear an average sermon ... we catch a great quote from an author ... we save a viral reel on Instagram ... but seldom translate them into practice. **In the same way that I have dozens (if not hundreds) of “viral recipes” saved and have tried only two ... and none have made the rotation ... our faith can become a spectator sport in which Bible reading, sermons, podcasts, and the like inform but rarely transform.** And as we go through Colossians, we’ll see in more detail what kind of fruit he had in mind. But for now, let’s get this: ***The test of genuine discipleship is not how much we show up or how much we know, but whether showing up and what we know changes how we live.***

## Strengthened

Lastly, Paul’s prayer for the Colossians moves from knowing God’s will and living it out to asking God that they will possess the power to finish well. Look at v. 11.

***“ ... being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience ... ”***

Note what the power is for: **great endurance and patience.**

Paul was realistic about the world believers inhabit. It is often hostile to faith and righteousness. To live a life pleasing to God in such a world takes *strength*. Like the pastor who prayed for my friend Shane, Paul does not pray for easier circumstances. He does not pray for the power to kick Satan in the teeth. No: he prays for us to keep going and to finish well.

The word “endurance” here is a prayer for the steadfast ability to persevere without growing weary or resentful. It’s a prayer that we will hold on when life becomes difficult, that we will continue in faith when temptation whispers compromise. It’s a prayer that we will trust God when His ways are hidden.

“Patience” speaks of our response to people. When we are patient, we refuse bitterness, retaliation, or despair when wronged. (Slide) ***Augustine once wrote that patience is “preferring to endure evil rather than to commit it.”*** That kind of patient endurance is strength under control, trust rooted in God’s justice.

It's the kind of strength we remember this weekend as we honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—a man who refused hatred, even in the face of violence and injustice. King once said, **“We must meet hate with love. If we do not, our hate will destroy us and the world.”**<sup>3</sup> His steadfast patience wasn't passive; it was a Spirit-fueled resilience that chose love over bitterness and forgiveness over revenge. That is the kind of endurance and patience Paul is praying for here.

**(Slide - Runna App Logo)** This week, I added something new to my exercise routine ... something I've long avoided and openly spoken against. I'm talking, of course, about RUNNING. Twice this week, I ran. But I didn't just start running, I downloaded and began using a training app to help me. I don't have Ath-Half aspirations or anything, but I do want the habit to stick, and I didn't want my impatience with myself and my body's inabilities to cripple my endurance ... my commitment to growing somewhat as a runner.

This is what Paul prays for us spiritually. He prays that we receive the strength to endure and trust. He prays that we will make it, and be all the more trusting as we go.

## Why Pray These Things?

So, I've highlighted three things Paul prays for the church. That we would be filled, fruitful, and strengthened.

Why does Paul pray these things? Verses 13-14 are the answer to that question.

***“He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”***

These verses provide the theological foundation for everything Paul prays. **His requests for spiritual understanding, fruitful living, and divine strength are the outworking of what Jesus did in his life, death, and resurrection.**

“Redemption” means we have been liberated from bondage to sin and transferred into the realm of Christ's rule. “Forgiveness” means that the deepest barrier between humanity and God—the guilt of sin—has been completely removed. In Christ, redeemed and forgiven people:

1. **Can now *know God's will*, for sin no longer confuses their hearts.**
2. **They can *walk worthy of the Lord*, secure in His acceptance rather than striving for it.**
3. **They can be *strengthened with divine power*, not crushed beneath guilt or shame.**
4. **They can *endure patiently and joyfully*, knowing that their standing with God is safe.**
5. **And they can *give thanks continually*, because they already share in the inheritance of the saints in light.**

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 51.

All of Paul's petitions flow from the saving reality described here: forgiven people live transformed lives. (Title Slide)

## Conclusion

For some of you listening today, all this talk about being "formed in Christ" might sound like something that only applies to people already following Jesus.

But the truth Paul describes isn't just for those already in the church—it's an invitation to all of us. You may not yet be sure what you believe about God, but maybe you recognize what it feels like to live in confusion, to be weary, to want strength and peace that your own willpower can't supply.

What Paul says here is that God doesn't just offer moral instruction or a new ritual—He offers rescue. Jesus came not to make good people better but to bring dead hearts to life, to deliver us from darkness into light.

If you've ever wondered where true change begins—not surface change, but the kind that reshapes your heart and gives purpose to your suffering—it begins with Christ in you. Today, that same invitation stands open: to be forgiven, renewed, and formed—not by trying harder, but by trusting the One who gave Himself for you.