

Colossians 1:9-11

Colossians 1:9 . . . we have not ceased to pray for you . . . ¹⁰ that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord . . . ¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience . . .

When Paul prayed for the Colossian Christians, he prayed that they would “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” – that they would embrace a lifestyle that pleases God because it represents Him accurately to the watching world. This lifestyle is multifaceted, as you can see by reading the whole text of this passage (Colossians 1:9-12). I wish to focus on one of those facets.

If you are like me, when you read Paul’s wind-up in the first half of verse 11 (“*strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might . . .*”), you expect a more impressive conclusion in the second half of the verse. With three references to God’s power (“strengthened;” “power;” “might”), I expect the verse to end with something like “so that you may perform dramatic miracles,” or “so that you may give stunning Bible teachings.”

Instead, Paul ends verse 11 in a way that seems anti-climactic to me: “. . . *for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience.*” My disappointment with this ending reveals how different my value-system is from God’s. *Steadfastness* (the ability to hang in there through difficult circumstances) and *patience* (the ability to hang in there with difficult people) may seem like bland – even optional – attainments to us, but God says they are essential to a life that pleases Him and attracts others to Him. God values them so highly that He makes His power



constantly available to us so that we can practice them day in and day out.

When you think about our mission as Jesus' followers, Paul's emphasis on steadfastness and patience makes more sense. We serve Jesus in a very fallen world. Beyond the "normal" difficulties that everyone experiences (e.g., sickness; natural disasters; pandemics; economic reversals), Christians face additional difficulties because of their allegiance to Jesus. Spiritual attack and human persecution are difficult to take. Busy schedules and financial sacrifices are real hardships. No wonder steadfastness is so important! No wonder steadfastness requires God's power!

Even more difficult are the relational challenges within Christian community. A friend of mine says (tongue-in-cheek): "Christian fellowship and ministry would be easy if it weren't for the people!" Practicing hospitality is costly. Forgiving brethren who sin against us is not easy. Seeing family members and friends walk away from Jesus is excruciating. Even when Christians grow, they grow slowly and with many set-backs. No wonder patience is so important! No wonder patience requires God's power!

If you are convinced that steadfastness and patience are high-level spiritual attainments, consider the following ways you can cooperate with God in the cultivation of these character qualities.

- You can pray, like Paul prayed here for the Colossian Christians, for God to empower you to be steadfast and patient. It is good to pray for this in an *ongoing* way, just as you would for other fruits of God's Spirit. Such prayers will unleash God's transforming work in your heart, and will increase your desire for steadfastness and patience.
- You can also pray for God's empowering *situationally*. Let's say that you had an abnormal number of circumstantial adversities this morning. You can let this make you sour or



sullen or stoic. You can decide to duck out of the spiritual commitments you have this afternoon and evening. Or you can call out to God: “Lord! I feel crushed by all of these painful developments. Please, encourage my heart and give me Your power to keep serving You for the rest of the day.” Sometimes, we do not have simply because we do not ask.

- You can reflect on the biblical truth that God is preparing you through today’s difficult people and circumstantial adversities for future challenges. Some years ago, in the midst of months of painful disappointments, my wife called me to relay some additional bad news. I groaned, and said to her, “I don’t have any idea what God is trying to do through all of this. It feels like He lifts me up a little bit – only to sucker-punch me again.” There was a long silence on the other end of the phone. Then my wise wife said, “Maybe God is building more endurance in you because He knows you’ll need it for bigger challenges down the road.” That was definitely not what I wanted to hear! But her words have rung in my ears ever since. When athletic coaches subject their players to difficult practices, it is mainly to prepare them for challenging game-situations that are likely to arise. How much more does God subject us to adversity so that we will develop the steadfastness and patience He knows we will need in the future? As the author of Hebrews says, “Endure your suffering as God’s training” (Hebrews 12:7 NET). Sometimes I look back on past difficulties that seemed meaningless to me at the time – and I see how God worked through them to equip me for challenges I had no idea were coming my way. Why not look at today’s adversities in this way?

Steadfastness and patience are not popular in contemporary American Christianity. When was the last time you saw a Christian leader advertise a seminar on how to become more steadfast in

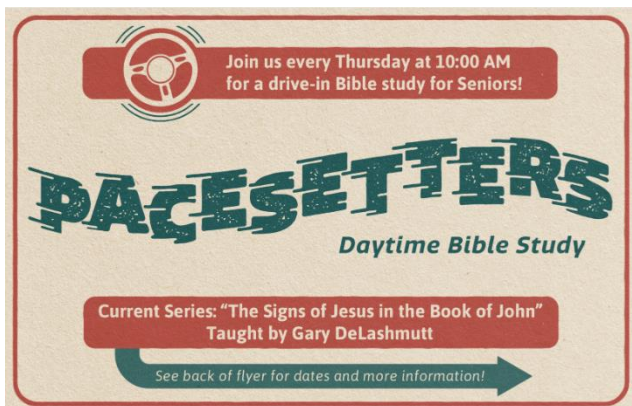


adversity? When was the last time you heard a church invite people to get involved so that they can become more patient with difficult people?

But God says that steadfastness and patience are essential character qualities that He is seeking to build into our lives. Difficult challenges *are* coming our way in the future. Of that we can be sure, because Jesus says, “In this world you *will* have tribulation” (John 16:33). Our addiction to circumstantial comfort and easy, disposable relationships will leave us unprepared for these future challenges. Far better to pray with Paul for the steadfastness and patience that will please God, attract others to Jesus, and lead to true joy in us!

Lord Jesus, help me to change my perspective on the difficult circumstances and people that are in my life. Thank You that You are working through them to prepare me for upcoming challenges. Thank You that You offer Your power to enable me to be steadfast and patient. And thank You for Your patience with me as I struggle to learn these lessons.

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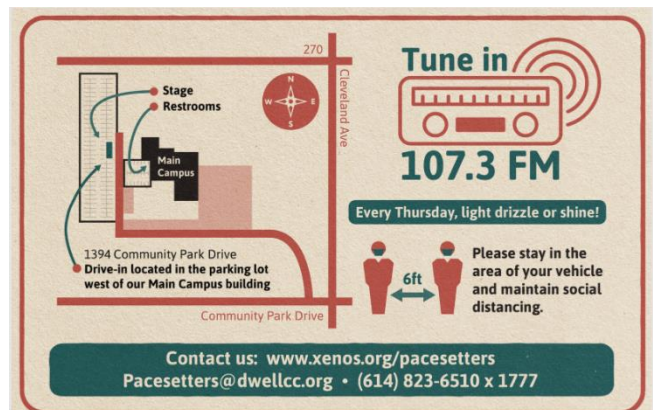
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