**SO THAT YOU MAY BEAR FRUIT AND GROW**

Colossians 1:1-14 (Key Verse 10)

“so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,”

Paul had been imprisoned in Rome and was visited by Epaphras one of the founders of the Church in Colossae. It is clear that he gave a very good report about the Colossian believers. However still he also came with concerns surrounding the Church and the influence of false teachings in the province. Colossae was not so far from Ephesus and as Paul spent some time in Ephesus people came from all over to hear his message. Epaphras became one the most Zealous persons from Colossae and later one established a Church there in Colossae. The Church was fairly young and in about 60-63 AD he had come to visit Paul prison mainly because of his concern for the Colossian believer’s faith. It is believed that Paul had never been to Colossae or been to the Church in Colossae. So the book of Colossians is about Paul’s letter which he writes to the Colossian believers in response to the report from Epaphras.

Challenges are not something new for the church, we too in our times have challenges as believers. There are still false teachings and ideas that have influenced the church and us all as individual believers. Where do we stand when it comes to abortion, when it comes to same sex marriages or same sex relationships and when it comes to gender identification, male and female. Recently our growing UBF chapter in Lesotho had growing questions around marriage and dating. Our thoughts and ideas around all these issues reveal a lot about what we know about the gospel and who God is. On a more closer level, the kind of things we ourselves indulge ourselves in, the kind of movies and music that we entertain ourselves with. Are they things that represent the type of faith we belong to. And on the other hand when the gospel is made clear, are we obedient to the call to follow Jesus and surrender to the will of God. Is Jesus master of our lives? Who have we given mastery of our lives? Our feelings, money, other persons, who?

As believers we may be in a constant cycle of not feeling fulfilled, feeling powerless over sin and lives hardships. When we are constantly struggling with the same thing year in year out. Instead of growing in producing fruits pleasing to God, we produce fruits pleasing to the flesh, jealousy, gossip, fatalistic thoughts, despair, etc. In Colossae they were facing almost same things just in a different form, for example they were falling into the believe of worshiping angels and legalism as we shall see in future chapters. Though they believed in Jesus, the influence of the Greeks and Gnostics taught them that Jesus was not enough, they needed other knowledge plus Jesus in order to be holy and have fulfilled lives. It is no mistake that the theme of this book is the Supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. We will forever remail slaves to sin and our own selfish desires, fall prey to teachings of the devil. All because we have not accepted Jesus as supreme and sufficient in our lives. Today’s passage we shall look into what is needed for us to live a life worthy of the lord, a life that bears fruit from a life of faith. I pray that God may bless our Colossians study, to be convicted of Christ Supremacy and sufficiency in everything including our lives and the Church. Let us now look at how Paul encourage the believers to live a life worthy of the Lord and that is pleasing to Jesus.

Look at verse 1-2, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.” Paul’s greeting begins with his very identity, that he is writing to them as “an apostle of Christ Jesus” not by his own choosing or human election, but by the will of God. Basically Paul is saying here that he is not writing his own human opinions, but that what he writes has the authority of God. He goes on to greet them, Grace and peace to you from our God our Father. This was a popular way of greeting the believers in those times. In this way Paul has set the tone of his letter and the authority of which he is writing.

Paul begins with giving thanks, from verse 3-5, Paul was thankful of their faith in Christ Jesus and love for one another. It was clear that they had hope in the kingdom of God that was brought about by the gospel truth. This newly found hope gave them faith in Jesus Christ and made them active members in loving one another [1-5]. Because of the gospel truth they had hope that is not dependent on the situation of this world, because of the gospel truth they heard they could have genuine faith in Jesus Christ. This is indeed an amazing work of God worthy of praise and thanksgiving. Imagine a gentile nation that knew nothing of God, but because of the gospel truth, could have hope in the coming kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ. From verse 6-8, Paul acknowledges that they had learned the gospel truth from Epaphras, who is a fellow servant and faithful minister of Christ Jesus. Because of the very gospel truth taught by God’s servant, all over the world the gospel was bearing fruits and it is growing just as it has grown among them. This gave Apostle Paul and servants of God great encouragement and gratitude to keep praying for them.

Let us all read verse 9-10, “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 in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,” Paul’s prayer was that, **firstly, they may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding**. What does this mean? Paul is not praying for material things but for knowledge that leads to spiritual maturity. This was not a prayer for them to have head knowledge of the word of God as they study the Bible, but a lifestyle that is worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way. This was not some intellectual knowledge, but a deep experiential knowledge that comes from personal relationship with Jesus.

**Secondly, that knowledge was so that, they may walk in a manner worthy of the lord and may please him in every way.** What does it mean to walk in a manner worthy of the lord? What is the lord worthy of?

Jesus is worthy of all honor, our full obedience, he is worthy of our lives. And this is where our problems begin, we have chosen to live lives that are worthy of certain people’s expectations and things in this world. We have given supremacy and mastery of our lives to people and things. For example, our desire for certain job positions, desire to pass the course and graduate, desire to be loved by someone, desire to be recognized and seen, etc. And the outcome is spiritual ups and downs, never maturing in faith ultimately a wasted life, no clear life purpose. What does it look like to walk in a manner worthy of the lord? It means to live in a manner that reflects Christ’s worth and calling. Our basic calling as Christians, is not self fulfilment but a life that pleases Jesus. The purpose of being filled with the knowledge of God’s will is so that we may live a live worthy of the lord. So that we may please God in every way. Not only on certain days, or at certain times of the day or certain times of the year. This means that every second of our lives belongs to God. Paul does outlines means by which believers can live lives worthy of the lord:

**Firstly,** **bearing fruit in every good work.** That life bears fruit in every good work. Generally people talk about doing good works. However, this passage is bit different. It says, bearing fruit in every good work. Good work is one thing and bearing fruit is another. That means from the good work, fruit is produced. Studying the bible can be good work, but then that good work needs to produce fruit. Epaphras is a good example of this, after he learned the gospel truth from Apostle Paul, he went on and did a good work of spreading the gospel truth and establishing Churches of which one of them is in Colossae. The fruit he bore was those who started to accept the gospel truth and more importantly the genuine love he had for others. “The fruit does not make the tree alive, but it proves it is alive.” In other words, how can you know you are alive in Christ Jesus, if you are not bearing fruit in every good work?

**Secondly, last part of verse 10 says, growing in the knowledge of God**. This means that, after doing good work that produces fruit, we also grow in the knowledge of God. Our knowledge of God will not grow from studying the Bible but from obeying what we learn, then as we produce fruit from good works, our knowledge of God will also grow. It was only when I started serving 1:1 Bible studies that I could understand better Jesus sacrificial love for me. Because back in the days I had a bible student who would not let me know that he cancelled our bible study, so after I shifted things around and made my plans for the day for Bible study. I would borrow Shepherds Rebekha’s car to go have Bible studies at the student place of residence. After knocking many times at their door and making calls there would be no responses. This would happen a couple of times and I would become greatly upset with the student in my heart. However over times as I learn about the gospel truth through Sunday messages and Bible studies, I would realize how I myself am no different before Jesus. I fail Jesus many times yet he keeps embracing me as his child, His love for me is unconditional. This made me understand better Jesus love and compassion for me. So I too pray that our study of the Bible may fill us with the knowledge of God’s will in every way, so we may bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God. May we live a life worthy of the knowledge of God.

**Thirdly, Strength from God, great endurance and patience,** verse 11 says, 11being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience. They could live a life worthy of the lord and please Jesus by relying on God’s strength. This means that, there will be trials and challenges in life. Most especially when we try to live a life that pleases Jesus. However, in order to live a life worthy of the lord, it is only possible if we but rely on God for strength. The source of strength is God’s glorious might, not human effort. This is how we can remain faithful to the end. You might not be able to do great miracles, however the lord will grant you a steadfast (firm, loyal, and unwavering in your purpose) character in life.

**Fourthly, we can live lives worthy of the lord by giving joyful thanks to the Father,** verse 12 says, 12and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. A life of gratitude, giving joyful thanks to God. However, this is not joyful thanks because, I got paid, or I passed my studies, got promoted or anything of those. But look at verse 12 again, giving joyful thanks to the father because he has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people. Verse 13-14 shows how we are qualified, look at verse 13-14, 13For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves 14in whom we have redemption, **the forgiveness of sins**. This is what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. Our sins were forgiven, we were made clear, guilty changed to innocent. Therefore, this joy should not depend on our life circumstances because no life circumstance can change what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. When we live with the reality of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, that he has qualified us, he has made us competent to inherit the kingdom of God. This means your life and mine are secure and safe. Nothing in this world can tough our lives. For what Jesus accomplished on the cross for us we can give joyful thanks to God. And this is how we can continually live a live worthy and pleasing to the lord. We are not in a competition of doing good works so that we can qualify to be saved. God has already qualified us through Jesus. You and me are good, you and me are righteous and holy in God’s eyes because of what Jesus did for you and me. The good works we do and fruits that follow are evidence of the accomplished work. And for this we rejoice as we see God’s work in us. Amen!

I still remember one testimony from shd Tsibela, who is leading the Lesotho UBF Ministry. The testimony was based on Mark 16:15-16, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”. In his testimony he writes, “I remember how I felt after being ordained as a shepherd—it was both scary and unbelievable. At the time, I had just submitted my research and was waiting for my main supervisor's final say. I decided to come home, intending to participate in NUL, where there was no leader. Sunday worship attendance was dwindling, and people were losing interest. Some quit altogether, complaining about the inconsistency of Sunday worship services. The ministry was torn apart, with fewer than five people attending per Sunday.

The first Sunday I came, only three people came—we did Bible study, prayed, and dispersed. I found Bible study alone to be insufficient, as I was used to hearing messages at Wits. So, despite the attendance numbers, I started preparing messages. The second Sunday, attendance increased to eight, and I delivered the message. The third Sunday, we grew to 16 members, even receiving new ones. Fear gripped me. I questioned myself—how could I lead these people? But I placed my faith in God. I prayed, Lord, if this is how it will happen, help me put my trust in You.

The members began asking questions, wanting to gain a deeper understanding of the ministry. Through all these moments, I saw God intervening, using a fearful servant, Tsibela, to preach his word. The fourth Sunday was their last before December exams, yet attendance still increased to 22. Now I could see—God was working behind the unseen. Though it seemed too early for me to be a shepherd, I realized why God had allowed it. He was using someone quiet and shy, proving that it is only through the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that I can overcome fear and inadequacy. Jesus overcame the grave, and that same power is at work in my life.”

Recently, on the first week of November we co-worked to organize a workshop on Dating and marriage God’s way. It was facilitated by Pastor Oscar from campus crusade. He was so moved by the members of the NUL UBF. Firstly, shd Tsibela expected 22 however close to 30 came. He was amazed at their reception of the lessons and their genuine engagement with bible material. P. Oscar said from start in the morning till they finished no one left. He said it reminded him of the evangelistic mission trip he did in Zimbabwe some years ago. That he never thought he would ever get such a feeling again. A feeling of the presence of God moving in lives of people. When I heard that, I could see that NUL UBF is a testimony of today’s key verse and message. Sh Tsibela received the gospel of Jesus and started to obey God’s word, doing good work by dedicating his life to teach and preach gospel of Jesus to NUL campus students. He had his own human weaknesses however decided to trust in God’s strength. Now he is bearing fruit in every good work, the good work is bearing fruit. NUL members are growing which means members themselves are sharing the gospel with others. When we receive the knowledge of God’s will, when we obey Him, we can live a life worthy of the lord and bear fruit from good works.

**In conclusion**, we learned that Paul’s prayer was not about material things but rather about knowledge. Knowledge of the will of God. Though we may study the bible and seek to know the knowledge of God’s will, this knowledge is acquired through obedience of what we receive from God’s word. This knowledge then leads to live a life worthy of the lord and pleasing to Jesus. It becomes a lifestyle to do good works that produce fruit pleasing to Jesus. The lord has provided knowledge of his will, we know God’s will, there is no question about that. If we can but obey and do what the word teaches, we too can produce good works that produce fruits pleasing to Jesus. And in so doing God’s knowledge of his will continues to grow in us. I really pay that, we may make it our life mission to pray and desire the knowledge of the will of God. So we may live with the joy of seeing God work and use our lives for His glory. Amen!