



Becky Towne

Becky and Jim Towne have been married for thirty-nine years. Jim pastors a Friends church in Penrose, Colorado, and Becky is Associate Dean, Director of the Doctor of Ministry program, and Professor of Christian Spirituality at Houston Graduate School of Theology. Although commuting for a time between Colorado and Texas, both are committed to following God's leading in ministry. Their family continues to grow and the tally is currently at eleven, including three granddaughters.

Becky recently completed two years of biblical language study and has translated Colossians 1:9-13 to accompany her week of devotional thoughts:

We...have not ceased praying on your behalf, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual insight, to walk worthily of the Lord, in all willing service, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened in all power according to the power of his glory in all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, the one who is qualifying you for the share of the inheritance of the saints in the light, the one who delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son.

BIBLE READING: Colossians 1:1-9

After the greetings of this first-century letter, Paul declared that he had been praying unceasingly for the Colossians. The first thing in his prayer list was that they might be filled with the knowledge of his [God's] will in all wisdom and spiritual insight. This week of devotionals will allow for reflection on each item in the prayer list to discover what insights may yet be gained from Paul's prayer of nearly two thousand years ago.

Recently, Jim and I spent a few days at a cabin in Colorado. During a conversation with our hosts, we learned about a man who rose early and pored over Scripture and commentaries for hours each day. He was intense in his desire to gain knowledge. One day, however, he wondered whether he had missed some of his calling. Rather than just amassing biblical knowledge, he realized that he was lacking the time to listen to God so that the knowledge could be applied—so that wisdom and spiritual insight could be gained as well.

I have been studying biblical languages over the last two years. I find myself poring over Scripture with academic learning tools and commentaries nearby. The insights I gain from translation exercises bring me much joy and insight. Even then, I am aware that beyond intense study, my life must be characterized by an ever-deepening relationship with God,` seeking wisdom and spiritual insight for the moment-by-moment events of life.

SONG: Open My Eyes That I May See

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we pray that Friends will be filled with the knowledge of your will in all wisdom and spiritual insight.

—Becky Towne

BIBLE READING: Colossians 1:1-10

This week we are reflecting on Paul's prayer for the Colossians. The second item in Paul's prayer list was that they might walk worthily of the Lord (v. 10). Many things come to mind regarding walking worthily, but a recent event brought a special insight into what that might look like.

Jim and I were excited to watch our fourteen-month-old granddaughter take her first steps. She walked between her mommy's and her daddy's outstretched arms and legs until she was tired and needed a break from her new endeavor. She laughed, giggled, and squealed with delight while she traveled back and forth, somehow understanding that she had gained the confidence to do something so spectacular that her parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles were clapping their hands, laughing, and squealing with delight as well.

That has been the image in my mind of walking worthily of the Lord—learning to walk this journey with a confidence that is laced with much joy. I can almost see Jesus with outstretched arms and a huge smile on his face cheering me on.

There is a lot to squeal with delight about in the next phrases of Paul's prayer—deliverance from the power of darkness and transference to the kingdom of God's beloved Son, just to name a few. Walking worthily of the Lord—perhaps giggling with delight—is a good way to proceed on this journey as disciples of Jesus.

SONG: Trust and Obey

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we pray today that Friends will walk worthily, focusing on your joy along the way.

—Becky Towne

BIBLE READING: Colossians 1:1-10

In Paul's prayer for the Colossians, the third item in Paul's prayer list was that they might walk...in willing service (v. 10). Serving willingly reminds me of Jesus.

John writes that when Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he knew exactly who he was. "And during supper, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself" (John 13:3-4). Jesus knew exactly who he was and then stooped to the place of the lowest of servants, willingly, to show his disciples what they should also be willing to do.

There are times in twenty-first-century life when Jesus' example of washing the disciples' feet can show up at unexpected times. I work in higher education. Seminary presidents are not often expected to do menial tasks. When the air conditioning unit died in our main building (in Texas in July), the president of the seminary was an example of serving willingly. He kept the cooler filled during our doctoral seminar and made trips to the store for cold drinks and ice. He helped set up classrooms in another building and was on call for whatever needs were encountered. The whole experience helped me reflect on Jesus to see the importance of functioning within our roles but not hesitating to step out of those roles willingly to serve.

SONG: Make Me a Servant

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we pray today that Friends will walk in willing service.

—Becky Towne

BIBLE READING: Colossians 1:9-13

As we reflect on Paul's prayer for the Colossians, the fourth item in Paul's prayer list was that they might walk...bearing fruit in every good work (v. 10).

Larry Richards writes that fruitfulness is a consistent concept in the Bible. The fruit God seeks in human beings is expressed in righteous and loving acts that bring peace and harmony to the individual and to society (Encyclopedia of Bible Words, 299).

I spend some time, nearly every day, on Facebook. I read stories of friends' lives and look at photos. Oftentimes, people ask for prayer. One day, a high school friend asked for prayer for her family situation. Her husband was laid off and unemployment had not kicked in so they had no income. I started to pray, like so many others, but was reminded that my friend lived nearby. The thought came to me that I could do something more than pray, so I purchased a grocery store gift card and prepared to deliver it. We scheduled a time to meet but, for a couple of reasons, she asked if I would mail the card, which I did. She was overjoyed to receive the card and texted me from the store.

The experience wasn't all that I hoped it might be, but fruit-bearing isn't necessarily about the result. Rather, fruit bearing is expressed through righteous and loving acts that bring peace. I have been paying better attention to thoughts during prayer lately and attempting to respond as directed so that my life can bear fruit in every good work.

SONG: Lead Me, Lord

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we pray today that Friends will bear fruit in every good work.

—Becky Towne

BIBLE READING: Colossians 1:9-13

This week, we are reflecting on Paul's prayer for the Colossians. The fifth item in Paul's prayer list was that they might walk...being strengthened in all power according to the power of God's glory.

This "power" is available to followers of Jesus, but it is not "somewhere out there." Believers are equipped by God with the power to follow Jesus as shining examples of God's presence in the world (God's glory). For doers like me, that is a hard concept because I prefer the "how-to" version of representing God's glory: just tell me what to do, and I will do it. I am discovering, however, that it is more about how God is at work in me, sometimes in mysterious ways, than what I determine to do for God.

"I don't know what it is exactly, but there's something about the way you play the piano that touches me." I hear sentences like this often. I know that I am not the most technical pianist in our congregation, nor can I play without some kind of music in front of me. But I do my best to pay attention to God's whispers as I prepare. I find that when I am more focused on how I might be impressing people or on what they might be thinking about me, my experience is not one of bringing God glory. At other times, I am amazed at the oneness I feel with the music, with the Spirit, and with the congregation. It is powerful and I love taking part in what God is doing.

SONG: To God Be the Glory

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we pray today that Friends will be strengthened in all power according to the power of God's glory.

—Becky Towne

BIBLE READING: Colossians 1:9-13

The sixth item in Paul's prayer for the Colossians was that they might walk...being strengthened in all power according to the power of God's glory in all endurance and patience with joy.

Recently, I was introduced to this quote from Thomas Edison: "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work." I knew that would fit so well with today's topic and knew what I would write. I woke up early and powered on my laptop to get started when the unthinkable happened—I couldn't get in. The computer had locked me out. I tried restarting, starting in safe mode, but my limited options were almost gone. All I could pray was, "Oh, Lord, help." I wasn't sure what else to do. Then, I decided to "put on my overalls."

I ventured into the belly of the great beast. I started looking around in the guts of my computer. I was nervous but decided to stick with my quest. I wasn't sure what I was doing. I noticed some things that didn't make sense. Then I found it—system restore. After a few clicks and a short wait, I was in! I was so excited.

Sometimes endurance is walking through something unpleasant, making it through, and looking for signs of God's presence along the way. Other times, endurance is simply hard work following a breath of prayer for help. Either way, I think Thomas Edison would give a nod of approval when opportunities to endure aren't missed. From today's Scripture passage and many more, I think God is nodding in approval every time.

SONG: Til the Storm Passes By

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we pray today that Friends will be strengthened in all power in endurance and patience with joy.

—Becky Towne

BIBLE READING: Colossians 1:9-13

Reflecting on Paul's prayer for the Colossians, the seventh item in Paul's prayer list was that they might walk...giving thanks to the Father.

We planted two sets of petunias in the front flowerbeds a couple of years ago. Both groups of flowers are near enough to the front door that I can see them morning and night when I come and go. I was so proud of them lasting two winters and growing strong and tall. Then last summer, we encountered a long, dry spell and were away for nearly two weeks. Upon returning, I was sad to find that the plants had nearly dried up. I started watering immediately. That helped, but I was still concerned every day that I might lose them.

Then the rains came. The grass, flowers, and plants thrived once again. Apparently making up for lost time, however, these were not showers—they were Texas downpours. I saw my flowers beat up and knocked down from the pounding rains that sometimes fell in sheets from the skies. But then I recognized a beautiful image of giving thanks to God. For on each following morning, the flowers were taller, fuller, more colorful, reaching toward the skies. The storm had done its work but so had the deep, refreshing moisture. With each storm, the flowers gained strength and beauty.

Walking worthily is standing, striding, bearing fruit, enduring, being strengthened, and giving thanks. My hope for Friends is that Paul's prayer for the Colossians will be answered among us even now, as we take a lesson from the flowers and give thanks—even when the storms come.

SONG: Thank You, Lord

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we pray today that Friends will walk worthily, giving thanks to the One who has transferred us into the kingdom of the one and only Son.

—Becky Towne