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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
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Title of sermon: **Growing Up**
Series: Against the Tide - #2

Colossians 1:9-14 NIV:

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, **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, **11** being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, **12** and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. **13** For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, **14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Well, good evening, everyone. I was, this afternoon, in-between our funeral and tonight, I was interacting with some students. I'm a faculty member of a small little situation in Phoenix, and -- one of our students was pondering praise, and that song -- I love that song, by the way -- Pastor Nathan, wherever you disappeared to in the clouds -- but, a student -- he's probably a bit in the darkness of clouds -- why would ever -- why would God demand praise? She puts a little caveat, "I know this is probably coming from Satan, so please forgive me, but -- I just struggle with why God would ever demand praise." And I was just thinking about that. This is not the sermon, by the way, this is just free. That song just was running through my head, and I was just -- when the enemy, when Satan is involved -- and he's always involved with worship. Whenever we worship, he's always there whispering. He's always -- because it was about worship that he left Heaven. And I began to wonder. What is the greatest threat to your life today? Think about it just for a moment. What is the greatest threat to you? I want to give you my answer. You can go home, wrestle with it. Email me if you think I'm wrong. Don't send me anything if you think I'm right. I think the greatest threat to our life is idolatry. Thinking less of God and more of you. And is not worship the greatest anecdote and assault to idolatry? Might it be that God demanded worship not for His sake, but for yours? Might it be that God, through this whole thing as we come together for worship, it's really -- it's about Him, yes, but might it be that our God is so other-centered that even in the bits of worship He's thinking of you? Rescuing you. And He draws your attention to His glory, but He's really rescuing you from you. Because your greatest threat is mine -- it's idolatry. Thinking less of God than who He is. And more of you and me. So, that's what the enemy always want us to be angry about, right? About all this junk today. And when we do, we think less of God. Well, I hope we sing that song again, because it stirred a lot in my heart about worship. It's a good one.

Wow! The other thing that -- that song was a little bit -- I was hoping that it wasn't too prophetic. Did you notice that line from the fire to the -- yeah! And I don't know about your house, but ours got, like, close to three inches of rain! And -- Pastor Jeff was sending me a note. "Have you heard the new warning? Flash floods are coming!" And I was, like -- "Yeah! And what else is coming?" The river, Willamette is going to turn to blood, and the grasshoppers are gonna come through, and earthquakes are gonna happen in Burns, Colorado, and then, you know, Ruth Ginsburg passes away, and I'm like -- absolutely. You know what the number one question that I get asked these days? Absolutely the number one question? Do you know what it is? You know what it is. Donna, do you know what it is? [Pause] What's that? Where in the Book of Revelation are we? Yeah.

[Chuckles] The only thing I can tell them with absolute assurance is, we're not in Chapter 21.

[Laughs] Oh, my goodness. And yeah, when is the tribulation gonna start? And so, all the pre-tribbers are just pleading that they're correct, and all the post-tribbers have got a little smirky smile on their face. You can always tell a post-tribber right now. They're all -- they're running around with a little smirky smile, going -- "I told you to get ready for this thing -- it's coming, and you pre-tribbers are thinking, 'Oh, we're gonna be out of here!'" Hang on. It's the number one question I get. Where are we in the Book of Revelation? My mom asks me that five times a day. Yeah. All right.

Well, my friends, we are not in the Book of Revelation, we're in a series. And it is called "Against the Tide." Why are we against the tide? Because we're not going to be muddled in all of the craziness of our world; we're going to look together at the life of Christ in His glory and His beauty. Last week we looked at hope, and this week we're going to look at a prayer that I believe every parent should tattoo on their head, every pastor should pray every day, and every person who is a mentor to anyone ought to have in their front forehead, the front of their iPad, on their iPhone. This should be one of the prayers that you pray. If you have a person that you're mentoring, you have a person that you love, this should be one of your prayers. It should be one of the things that you bring before God, because Paul in this text orients us to some of the most significant directives and focal points of things that we should be praying about. That is, if you believe prayer makes a difference.

It was a number of years ago, it's one of my favorite stories from the years ago. It's probably close to a hundred years ago. Raymond Edman, he staggered in from an Ecuadorian jungle. When he came in from the jungle, he was ravaged with disease. The doctors came to his house and they said to his dear wife as she was standing there next to him, "Your husband will not make it to morning." In the Ecuadorian jungle there was a practice that you had the funeral immediately, and so -- strangely, probably to you, you would not do this -- but to his wife, as they were missionaries there in the jungle, this is what she did. She went out, she got her wedding dress, and she dyed it black immediately, because she was preparing for the funeral, because the doctor said, "Your husband is going to die. He won't make it through the night." She sat by his bedside and she prayed. But thousands of miles away in a church, it was in Boston, and it was there that Joseph Evans, the pastor of that church, was in the middle of a prayer meeting. And he stopped, as history tells us, he stopped in the middle of the prayer meeting. They weren't quite in prayer yet, which was often common. They would have a little teaching time and then they would enter into prayer. But as Joseph was working through that evening, as Mr. Evans was teaching, he immediately stopped and he said to the entire congregation, "We must pray. There is a spiritual battle for my friend Raymond Edman, and we must pray until I feel the release of God." He stopped everything and the church prayed. In Boston. They prayed for a season far beyond what they normally did on that Wednesday night. And then Pastor Evans said, "I believe God has won the victory."

If you know the story -- and it's a well-told story -- the missionary in Ecuador, he did survive. His wife's dress did not. He did survive, and Raymond Edman became the president of Wheaton College, if you know his history. In fact, he was there for 40 years. Why? Because I believe with all of my heart, absolutely to the core of my being, that prayer makes a difference. God has put into the fabric of faith and life that if we pray -- and the condition is there -- IF my people humble themselves, IF my people will pray, then I will hear. He says IF you bring a person to the elders to pray, IF you act in prayer, IF you come. The condition is there. It's not a guarantee. It's not slapping some mechanical sovereignty upon God's life that God knows all things, therefore, all things are predicated or predicted or mechanically determined by God. That world doesn't exist. As far as I can tell. The world that does exist is the world that says God honors faith. And faith is expressed through prayer.

A number of years ago I went through all of the prayers of Paul, and I just circled every prayer of his, and I read down through it, and I kind of wrote, "How long would it take me to pray this prayer?" and I identified who he prayed for, and the number of churches, and the people he prayed for. I estimated that somewhere in the vicinity of an hour to two hours a day, Paul prayed. He prayed for the church in Colossae. He prayed for the church in Thessalonica. He prayed for his dear friend Timothy. He prayed for Titus. He prayed for the various elders. And he named them. And he prayed for the replacements that Titus would do in Crete, and he identified all of these areas, and he prayed. And you say, what did he pray? Not a lot of the things that we pray, candidly, in church. He didn't pray for a lot of surgeries. He didn't pray for too many financial issues. But what he prayed for, he believed made all the difference in the world. And if you're a parent, if you're a pastor, if you're a teacher, you might want to listen in to Paul's prayer, because they will orient you to make the most single significant deposit of faith and difference in the people that you say you love. And I believe you. I believe you love them, and if you do, then what is it that we would give people that we love as a gift? Paul says in this text, and I read from the Book of Colossians, chapter one, starting in verse nine -- "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you, asking God to fill you with all the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every good way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints and the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son that he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

When Paul was writing -- it's important to know, what was he writing -- he was writing to a group of people that in a philosophy of their day they heard this language of knowledge all the time. These individuals, you probably have heard the term before, the Gnostics. They were the philosophers of the day. And like we have philosophers of the day today, kind of the "woke" language of their day. What were they teaching them? They were saying that you had to have knowledge, and that knowledge was the most critical thing you could have. Knowledge was more important than experience. Knowledge was critical and knowledge was separate from your body, and this knowledge was enlightenment, and if you had it, you had everything. And so, Paul takes them head-on, and he goes, "I'll tell you what I want to pray for. I want to pray for spiritual intelligence. I want to pray that you would have an enlightenment, an encounter with knowledge. But it's more than just knowledge. It's not the knowledge that the Gnostics are talking about, it's the knowledge that has a characteristic of --" What? Wisdom and understanding. It's a knowledge that brings wisdom, the capacity to apply knowledge, the capacity to know what to do in a situation. You see, wisdom takes knowledge and moves it into practice, action. Paul can't imagine a world where he would separate the capacity to know something and the actions of what you do. And so, he's putting them together, and he says, "I pray that you would know a knowledge of God's will." How to act, where to walk, what to do. And have wisdom to know what the path looks like, to how to take the knowledge of God and to move it into action. But it's not just that -- it's understanding the ability to see. It's the ability to apply. It's the ability to see. When a person operates with understanding in relation to God's will, they have the ability to have discretion, discernment. They know more than just facts. They know what's behind the motive, the ulterior motive, the thirst, the motivation of a person's heart -- the yearnings, what's driving them. They know the pathway to God. They know not just the language of God, they know not just the word of God but how to take the word of God and move it into the application. You see, God is almighty and He's all powerful. That's marvelous, but if He's a vending machine to you it's dangerous. God is glorious and He can part the Red Sea. But if

He's nothing but your Santa Claus upon the strings of your whims, then He becomes the bane to your life and He becomes a frustration.

What was his prayer? "God, I want my children, I want my church -- I pray that they would be filled with the knowledge of your will. They would have a capacity of wisdom and understanding." How does wisdom and understanding affect life? Well, we've heard a lot of stories from up the canyon. One story -- well, a number of stories capture me, but one story in the middle of the night. A neighbor came to another neighbor and they had to make literally in seconds a critical decision. "Do I send this couple into the river or do I send them down the hill?" And when you make that decision, you have all kinds of decisions and thoughts that you're wrestling with. You're wrestling with the knowledge, you're looking at the understanding of this couple, what capacity do they have? Can they endure a night in the river? Can they make it? What ability do they have if they go down and their car stops? What capacity in their lungs? And the person in seconds -- and the entire time they're seeking God and they're asking Him, "Give us the ability to make a decision that is directed by you. Whether we live or not, ultimately, God, is your decision." And it is. But in seconds they had a decision to make, and there were so many factors.

I could go on. You probably have heard the same things, story after story after story. What are you praying for? "God, as I'm asking for your will, give me the capacity not just to make a decision, but Father, to take the knowledge of your will, your scripture, and to apply it into life with understanding of the person involved, the context involved, and every other factor that influences this decision." You see my friend, Paul trumps the Gnostics. What he's asking for is "God, would you bring the capacity of the divine into the reality of the human being far beyond their ability. Far beyond their intelligence, far beyond their IQ. Would you open their eyes" -- even says, in another passage of Ephesians, "Open their eyes, that they might see. Open their hearts, that they might understand." This is common language for Paul. One of the worst things that you can do is to make decisions void of the consequences of those decisions. One of the worst things you can do is to make decisions void of a true understanding of how, what's gonna impact -- what is horrific is to make decisions void of particular knowledge. I never knew this, I didn't understand this. How many people have made horrible decisions, and they say, "I never fully understood." That's what Paul is saying. When you pray, pray this -- pray for spiritual intelligence, that they would have a full grasp of the knowledge of God's will. And when a person operates an understanding in the relation to God's will, they have the capacity to have discretion and to know what is the right tool to use and to know how much weight to use. You see, you might use the right tool, but if you use too much weight you can crush it. You might have a hammer, and the hammer is the right tool, but if you use too much weight, you come down with all kinds of force, and you can just shatter the very thing that you're hammering. Paul is down to the very fine elements of life. "God, give them that unique capacity to know your will. And to know how to apply it. And to see the elements that they need to see."

For those of you who have children -- I often think, we could not have raised four more different kids. They really are very different. They're motivated by different things. To our oldest, terribly compliant. To our second -- huh. You wondered. To our third -- ho! He had one day in his life of disobedience. One day, one moment! Annie -- she's perfect. She lives without sin. If you want to know what it's like to live without sin, look at her. They were so different. And they were different in every way! Our first, naps -- ha, glorious! Three hours. Our second, if Mom got 20 minutes it was a great day. When you look at them, they were so different. Just like your kids. When you have kids in your classroom and you're a teacher, you look at them and it's like, "Oh, you're all 12 years of age, and that's where the similarity stops!" And after that, they're wildly, marvelously, creatively different. What's God saying? May you know the will of God with understanding and wisdom how to lead, how to teach, how to reach each child, directed by God.

My friends, for those of you who lead people -- you lead every person the same and you're not going to get good results. Oh, I understand you have to wrestle with the fairness gods and you have to go down to the HR department, periodically salve them, but the fact is, when you lead people you're dealing with different people. And what Paul is praying is, "God, give them a knowledge of your will with all spiritual wisdom and understanding." He's not saying that so you know how to read the -- you know, the formations of the stars. He's saying that so that you know how to lead. He's saying that so that you know how to parent. He's saying that so you know how to run your business. He's saying that so you know how to walk with God.

The second part of this prayer -- he moves on, and he says, secondly -- "And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord, and that you may please Him in every way." Whenever he says, "When you live in a manner worthy of God," often he says in another form, when you live in a manner, or you walk in a certain manner, he's talking about the conduct of your life. But then he gives another aspect to it, and it's this concept of pleasing. Where would he use that? The term is a term that he used, or that the Hebrews would use, when they're talking about a sacrifice. A sacrifice is a pleasing aroma. Now, it seems weird that they would have that, but I think it's not that weird. I mean, you who -- I mean, if you're a vegan, just plug your ears for the next, just, minute and you'll be okay. Trust me. We're not all gonna die in here, we're gonna talk about beef. And if you've ever gone over to somebody's house and it's just -- the barbecue is bellowing over the back, and it's just coming into your nostrils, nobody goes, "Oh, how disgusting!" Unless you're a vegan. What you say is, "[Sniff] Ah, that is glorious!" It's exactly what happens to God. But it's not a cow, it's you. And it's not because you're being roasted, it's because you're walking in a way that brings a fragrant aroma to God. What is Paul praying for? He says, "I want you to live a fragrant life." In what way? Three ways. Number one -- I want you to live a very fruitful life. He says in verse 10, "I want you to bear fruit." "I want you to bear fruit, and we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work." Repeating again, "Growing in the knowledge of God." Well, what kind of fruit is he talking about? Well, is he talking about the fruit of the Spirit, growing in grace and patience and peace and -- well, yes! Absolutely. That's a powerful life. He's not necessarily talking about victories, like -- or kind of events, like coming out of Egypt, or Paul raising the dead. He's talking about character. He's focusing because he believes, and as I do, that probably the single greatest way you can make an impact in a person's life is not so much praying that they have an easy life, not so much that they get the raise, not so much that they get the new home, not so much that they get the car, but that they become a certain kind of person.

I have to confess that if you were to examine some of the early stages of my Christian life as a parent, I really was praying some rather trivial things. I was praying that they would do well on a test. Oh, okay. But when I look at Paul's prayers, what he's praying for is that you would bear fruit. That they would become a kind of person, that they would become patient, enduring, loving, kind, peaceful, content. He prayed that their faith would touch the community, would change people's lives. He prayed that they would bear fruit when they touched people's lives, that when they moved into their community that they would be the kind of folks that would be the first to run over to the fairgrounds to say, "Can I help?" He prayed that they would be the kind of people that would look at their trailers and say, "Hey -- we're not using our trailer for the next month. How about if somebody lives in it instead of it sitting in our back yard getting rained upon." Generous. He prayed that those would be the kind of people. Why? Because he says, when you bear fruit in every good work, what happens? Matthew 5:16 -- Matthew 5:16 says that he's praying that you would bear good fruits, and then people would give praise to your father who is in Heaven.

Oh, yes, my friends. That's what he's asking for, that you would live a fruitful life. Today we celebrated Virginia Widman's life. She passed away. It struck me -- she was known, people were describing her -- she was generous. She was other-centered. She traveled the world. She trained missionary kids all over the world. They listed this huge and after listing it all, there was one line that caused everyone -- at least it did me -- to kinda gulp. And for those of you who were in the room, you'll know what the line was. And she never made more than \$20,000 a year. Are you kidding me? How do you become known for generosity, traveling the world, teaching missionary kids all over the world, becoming a mentor to hundreds of teen girls, investing in them, helping them, have some of them come and live with you and pay for them, and help them go to school? How do you do all of that on less than \$20,000 a year? "I pray that you would bear fruit in every good work. I pray that you would live a fruitful life. I pray that you would live a powerful life." Not great feats, but character. What kind of life? Powerful life. What is in a powerful life? Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you might have great endurance and patience and joyfully giving thanks to the father. Dear God, would you make my children powerful. Father, would you make the people who attend our church powerful. Would you make them so incredibly powerful, filled, absolutely filled with the kind of power that makes a difference. There's a word that's never used of God -- ever, as best I can tell. There's a word that's never used to characterize God or that he never feels. You know what that word is? It's despondent. God is never despondent. And do you know what the opposite of despondent is? Patient. The opposite of it is patient, and that's what Paul is praying for. I pray that though you might be inclined to a sense of despondency, I pray actually that you would be patient to endure when circumstances are difficult. What's despondent? To give up. To be overtaken. To be overwhelmed by circumstances. God is never overwhelmed by circumstances. He's never frustrated by circumstances. He's never fraught with worry about circumstances, and that's why Paul prays, "I want you to be godly. I pray that you would be patient. I pray that you would endure. I pray that you would endure when circumstances are difficult." Why? Because it enables you to finish. It enables you to complete what you started.

Probably the most important skillset as a parent is consistency. Most parents fail because they set rules and they just don't follow through. And the kids learn -- "Ha! If you can just stay past Mom and Dad's 'A' game and get to their 'B' game, you win!" That's why he's praying! For what? Endurance, patience. Because if you can learn patience and if you can learn endurance, you'll be some of the best parents in the world! If you can be patient, you can be like Virginia. She taught 26 years over in somewhere like La Grande, Burns, somewhere out where God and sin have never touched. It's a long way away. And then she went down to California, then she went to Brazil, then she went to Albania. A total of, I think it was 48 years! Now -- no disrespect to teachers, but most teachers, when I see them at 48 years of teaching, you know what I tell them? You should've quit at 30. Not her. Oh, she was enduring. She was faithful. She was filled with vim and vinegar. She was passionate. Somebody must have been praying for her. She had a powerful life, filled with patience.

It was Charles Spurgeon who said, "By perseverance the snail reached the ark." I always loved that line. It's true. By perseverance the snail reached the ark, and by perseverance, my friend, you are going to make it as a parent, you're gonna make it as a teacher, you're gonna make it this year. And he prayed for longsuffering. I think patience has to do primarily with circumstances and longsuffering has to do with people. It has to do with how you're patient in particular with people. Willing to bear up with them, endure with them, participate with them, hang on with them. And sometimes it's that ability to say the hard thing, that when a person is enduring something, that they want through it and it's -- God's not answering their prayer, is to help them see that God is doing a deeper work in them. Not necessarily maybe the shallow work of getting them out of the circumstance, but the deeper work of forging something strong in them. No wonder why this is Paul's

prayer. What Paul is praying for these people is that they would see God for who he is, and that they would act like it. They would see God for exactly who he is, and they would act like it. And when they do, they will live a thankful life.

You and I need to be thankful as much as you and I need to praise God. Because if I can't live a thankful life, I don't understand the obligation that I owe to God. There are two men in a church. They went to the same church, and one needed the help of another. Tim needed Doug's help. And Doug helps Tim significantly. I changed the names to just change it up. Doug helped Tim in this church so significantly, but something happened, and Tim began to get weird, because he didn't know what to do with the obligation back to Doug, and they began -- Tim began to avoid Doug, and he began to not speak to him, and when they had small group he would kind of avoid eye contact. And pretty soon he avoided the small group, and then he found it easy to not even just go to the church, and finally, Doug went up to Tim, and he had the courage to say, "Tim, what's wrong?" Tim says, "I just don't know what to do. You helped me so significantly. I don't know how to live with my obligation to you." And Doug said simply, "Have you ever tried 'thanks'?"

Yeah. How strange is it that some of us live that way with God. He has saved us, redeemed us, forgiven us. Have we ever said "thanks"? Or are we focused on what He hasn't done recently? What is Paul praying? I want you to live a powerful life, and a thankful life. Why? Because that's fragrance to God. What is He asking for? When you love someone with all of your heart, this is what you pray for. That they would see God for who He is, and live their lives like they know it. They would see His will, and the wisdom of it, and the understanding of it. And they would live their life like they know it. Worthy, bearing fruit. And when they do, they live a courageous life. They do. They do things beyond their strength, beyond their power. They live a supernatural life.

You know, in our church, on our staff, there's one huge baseball fan and then there's me. I was at an estate sale the other day and they had some old, old bats, and I thought about buying these bats -- only for Pastor Jeff, because he's -- well, he would appreciate them. I would use them for somebody trying to loot my house. That's it. But when you have a good story, you have a good story. And there's a story out of baseball. You know the story. You know the players. You know some of the people that were involved. Go back -- you have Branch Rickey. He was an executive. If you don't know who that is, you can ask the Dodgers fan over here who knows all things Dodgers. And then you know Branch's pastor, Wendell Fifield. And there was a day that Branch was perplexed about a person that he wanted to sign. The racial tension was thick, just like today. Only maybe notch it up a little bit -- like ten times. And on that day, Branch, in his perplexed place, went down to his pastor's office, walked in -- unannounced -- and his pastor said, "Can I help you?" And he simply said, "I just need to be present in your room. I don't need to ask you anything. I just need to be here." "You don't wanna talk to me?" "No." "You don't wanna ask me anything?" "No." So the pastor went back to studying. And Branch Rickey paced all over the office. Now, I don't know about you, but if that happened with me, I probably wouldn't get much studying done. But -- Branch Rickey paced and paced and paced. And finally, he shouts out -- about as rudely as when he walked in the door -- "I've got it!" And the pastor said, "What?" "I've got it! I know what to do." "What are you gonna do?" "I'm gonna sign him."

Who was he praying about? Yeah. There was a black baseball player that people told Branch Rickey, "If you sign it'll be the worst decision of your life." But when he had to make a decision, and he had to know that he was strong, and he had to know that he had the knowledge of the will of God with wisdom and understanding, he went to his pastor's office and he prayed. In an interview later, they asked his family, and here was a response that I love. He knew that he was going to be pretty well isolated in making this decision, so he needed all the strength that he could summon up

to be able to take the step to sign Jackie Robinson, and to do that, he prayed. If you don't believe prayer makes a difference, don't pray. Save your time. Go serve in a soup kitchen. But if you believe prayer makes a difference, you're going to want to ask the question -- "What do I pray?" I think you want to pray that people would have the knowledge of God's will, that they would see with wisdom and understanding, and then know how to walk, because when they do, they'll sign Jackie Robinson. They'll do courageous things, and they'll honor God. That's how you pray.

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