

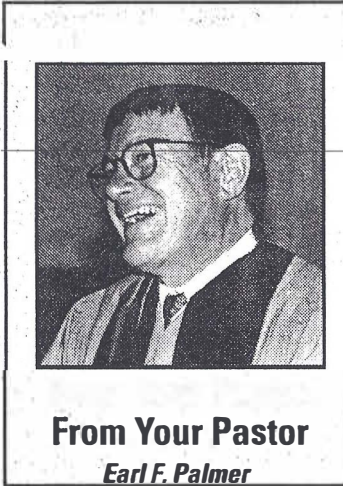
# Prayer is for three marks of discipleship

In St. Paul's letter to the Philippians he offers a prayer for them that is a good prayer for us today. Paul prays to the Lord that the Christians who read his letter will live their lives worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. "It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more... filled with fruits of righteousness...so that your manner of life is worthy of the gospel of Christ." (Phil. 1:9, 11, 27).

He prays that they will have two kinds of wisdom: the understanding of the profound truth of the gospel, and added to that the kind of insight that is able to think things through clearly. "...Abound more and more, with deep knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent." (Phil 1:9,10). The word in our English text, "discernment," has the First Century Greek meaning of "common sense."

Paul is praying for three marks of Christian discipleship: spiritual depth, lifestyle congruence and day-to-day common sense. The great apostle, Paul, seeks from God these three marks for his friends at Philippi.

If this is our prayer too, I wonder how God will fulfill such



be the learners and that is where the "exercise" comes in. Congruence describes someone who dares to put into

a request today? Spiritual depth comes from what Martin Luther called "exercising lives in grace." This happens as we fill our minds and hearts with the content of the gospel of Jesus Christ so that the gospel shapes our thinking and our character.

This is why I know of no substitute for a daily diet of the Bible that comes from worship and Bible study. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will be our teacher, but we must

daily practice the grace and faithfulness of God that our minds have come to understand. This is a journey experience with ups and downs in which God confirms to us that life works better when we follow His way of righteousness. But like skiing on the downhill ski I only discover the validation of the truth when I dare to do it.

Common sense is thinking clearly even when the moral and spiritual air we breathe is clouded and when we are tempted to set aside the truth of the gospel for some other way. Sound common sense decisions and judgment calls

come from daily experience of the faithfulness and love of God, and also from friends who help us to sort our options realistically. As Christians, this is why isolated people usually are less skilled in common sense and this is why the New Testament letters like Philippians make such a big thing of the fellowship of Christians with each other.

If St. Paul were writing a letter to this century of high tech energy and speed would these three marks of discipleship be on his prayer list for us? I think so.