

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."
Philippians 1:3-6

I'll Pray for You

A Study of Philippians: Philippians 1:3-11

Has anyone ever told you, "I'll pray for you"?

I know I have said it. I am sure I had good intentions, but in the end – I didn't pray.

It sounds terrible, but many of us are guilty of the same thing. Of course, this does not make it right, but it does help us to see that prayer is work. Prayer takes energy, time, and effort. We need to be disciplined in prayer.

Do you set aside time to pray? Why or why not?

What are some things that keep us from spending time in prayer?

It may be the kids, the dishes, the job, or the house repairs that keep us from praying, but whatever it is; we find ourselves at the end of a day or even a week and realize that we did not pray. Sometimes it is not until we are in a crisis that we pray.

So it is true! We all could spend more time in prayer, but that begs the question – What do we pray? I have asked myself that question at times. I have worked through my list of requests and prayed for family and friends and then I wonder, "What next?"

We can learn much from Paul when it comes to prayer and it will help us as we continue to develop in the discipline of prayer. Many of his letters start off with a prayer. Does that seem odd to you? Paul introduces himself and then he breaks into a prayer. Interestingly enough, his prayer is usually the content of the book in a summary form. Read verses 3-11.

What are some things that stick out to you in this prayer?

His first four words alone can teach us about prayer. "I thank my God." Paul was thanking God. How often would these words start your prayer time? It is difficult to thank God when we are experiencing hardship and pain, but as we learned, Paul is not in the best of times. He is in prison, yet he still is thanking God. But there is more to this prayer. In this prayer we can see the heartbeat of Paul.

Paul is a man of prayer. As he thinks about the church in Philippi, he is continually thankful. In fact, he often prays for this church and he lets them know it. The first half of his prayer is dedicated to what has been taking place in this church. Paul commends them for their passion and heart for the gospel. He always offers prayer not because this church has good people in it. He is offering prayers because this church is a living gospel to the city. They are sharing the gospel and living the gospel in their lives.

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Philippians 1:9-11

This is Paul's passion – to live and breathe Christ!

Only a few verses later do we see that for Paul to live is Christ! Paul desires to be a “living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, which is his reasonable service!” It only stands to reason that he desires the church to be a living sacrifice as well. In fact, he uses a key Greek word. Here in verse five, some have translated it participation, but most places it is translated fellowship, which has intimacy written all over it.

Would you say there is a difference between partnership and fellowship? How does fellowship convey intimacy?

Paul wants to convey an intimate relationship that is taking place for the furtherance of the gospel. He feels connected to this church as they share in ministry together. This is a connection that leads him to pray for their continued growth and development as living sacrifices, and the rest of his letter is an encouragement of how to continue and press on. It is Paul's way of being a cheerleader.

We all like to be “cheered on.” Why is that?

Encouragement is a powerful motivator. It can move even the hardest of hearts to accomplish a task. Paul understands this and continues to encourage the church as he shares what he is praying for.

Read verses 9-11 again.

Why is love so important to our spiritual growth?

It is because of love that God sent His Son and it is love that shows our devotion to Him. Paul prays that the Philippians grow more and more in their love. This love is not directed towards anyone in particular, but is meant to include all. This love is also directed through spiritual knowledge and moral decisions.

Why is it important to have guides on love?

Unbound love can lead to poor decisions and misunderstandings. Love needs to be guided by our continual study of God and our constant commitment to live morally. When love is guided by these two motivators, it becomes very passionate and very powerful in God's hands. Paul explains this.

Notice how this love, guided by spiritual knowledge and moral decisions, leads to the ability to discern what is excellent. Again, our English translation leaves us with a little less than what is intended. The word used here for excellent carries with it the idea of something worthy of our time. In other words, Paul is praying the love will direct us to use our time in a way that furthers God's kingdom. This is further confirmed by Paul's descriptive adjectives – sincere, blameless, and complete.

How would you define sincere and blameless?

I hope it is no surprise by now that Paul is very particular with the words he uses. Sincerity means to lead a life that is transparent to God and to others. It is a scary thought, isn't it? Paul is praying that the Philippians lives are an open book and easy to read testimony. It means no behind the scenes ulterior motives. As if that is not enough, Paul prays for a blameless love, which means a love that seeks to not cause someone to stumble. When was the last time you did something out of a selfish motive or vindictive attitude? I do not have to think too far back.

Another descriptive word used is complete or filled with the fruit of righteousness. Our lives are to be an example of right living, but notice the aspect of fruit. Fruit is always the end product. We cannot bear fruit apart from the tree.

This is why Paul reminds us in this prayer that the fruit of righteousness that others see was given birth in our hearts as a result of the presence of Jesus Christ.

So, now let's put it all together.

Paul's prayer is a thanksgiving to God for the testimony and partnership of the Philippians. This thanksgiving compels him to pray for a continued work in their lives. This continued growth is based on love and guided by spiritual knowledge and morally right decisions. Guided love gives them the ability to make kingdom decisions which results in sincere, blameless, righteous living that is fueled by Christ.

This same prayer can be said for each one of us. Love God. Love others.

As Paul closes this letter, he reminds us what or who this is all about. Our lives are to be living testimonies of the love of Christ for the glory of God. This single passion is Paul's heartbeat – to know Christ and reflect Him.

Paul prays with passion. He prays with conviction. He prays with extreme focus.

Paul prays as man who continues to be radically changed by an intimate Savior.

This thought drives me to my knees and that's not a bad thing.

Care to join me?

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?
