



Radio Ministry of Cornerstone Community Church

"Praying with Joy"

Philippians 1:3-11

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Let's open our Bibles together to the book of Philippians. We introduced the book last Lord's day as a letter of encouragement from the apostle Paul to the believers in Philippi – a city in the area of Macedonia that the Lord called the apostle Paul to take the gospel to. He is now in prison in Rome and writing this letter along with Timothy to the church at Philippi to encourage them – encourage their growth in the Lord, and also to thank them for their involvement in the worldwide work of the gospel. For they had sent a gift to him, a financial gift to support the work of the gospel, and the letter of Philippians is his thank you note to the church.

Verses 1-11:

"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:1-11; ESV)

The Apostle Paul considered prayer an indispensable part of his ministry to others. We see that emphasized here in this Scripture as Paul testifies to the Philippians how often he thanks God for them, and he prays for them.

We notice today's Scripture is divided into four parts.

First, the remembrance.

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy."

Paul says, I pray for you. I pray for you all the time. And when I pray for you, it's a joyful thing! it is a joy to pray for you, Philippians. When he remembered them his heart was stirred with

joy, it was stirred with appreciation, it was stirred with remembrance. Remembrance of their love for Christ in their involvement in the work of the ministry. That joy led him to continue to pray, to pray always for them. So, we see the priority of prayer in the Apostle's ministry.

And that's not only evident here in this little letter of Philippians, but in many of the letters the Apostle Paul wrote to other churches, and to individuals. You see prayer being a huge priority in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. And you also see that their spiritual needs, and in particular, their growth toward spiritual maturity being the priority subject matter of his prayers. Let's listen to a few comments that he makes to other churches.

To the Romans he says, *"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers"* (Romans 1:9-10a).

Or to the Corinthians: *"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus"* (1 Corinthians 1:4). Even at the beginning of the most difficult letter that the Apostle was ever called to write, that letter we know as 1 Corinthians, he says, I thank God for you because of the grace of God at work in you!

In Ephesians he says, *"For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers"* (Ephesians 1:15-16).

Or to the Colossians: *"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints"* (Colossians 1:3-4).

1 Thessalonians: *"We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers"* (1 Thessalonians 1:2).

2 Thessalonians: *"To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good in every work of faith by his power"* (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

His last letter to Timothy, which was the last letter he actually wrote before his death, he said, *"I thank God whom I serve as did my ancestors with a clear conscience as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day"* (2 Timothy 1:3).

And then to his friend, Philemon, he says, *"I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ"* (Philemon 4-6).

Did you notice the emphasis that the Apostle places on the ministry of prayer? Did you also notice the emphasis that he places on the issues of the heart – the issues of the heart and the soul, and the spiritual work that is needed in the lives of God's people? That was his priority. He prayed for their faith, for their love, for their fruitfulness.

Now, this is not to say that he didn't care about their physical needs. That's not the point. He did. But it is to say that he knew there was something greater than any physical need! And that was the work of God in the heart; to stir up faith, and love, and fruitfulness, and every good thing, because Paul knew that physical healing is of little value if the heart remains sick.

So, I encourage you, as you pray for one another, pray for the work of God in the heart toward spiritual maturity. Yes, let's pray for each other's needs: physical needs, material needs, financial needs, health needs. But let us not limit our prayer to that. There are many, many churches that have prayer lists that are filled, and filled pages and pages and pages of physical needs, but how much time is spent praying for the needs of the heart? The need for the Holy Spirit to do a great, great work. How much greater is praying for God to do a work in the heart of a person, bringing them to Christ, bringing them to deeper levels of obedience and discipleship, than it is to pray for aunt Bertha's hangnail! I'm not saying God doesn't care about aunt Bertha's toe, but there are greater needs. So, let us pray for the needs, but let us then go from there to pray for the things that really, *really* need to change; the things that will last forever. So, this is the remembrance.

Secondly, let's look at the reason.

Why did Paul pray always? Why could he honestly say I'm always praying for you, and I'm always making mention of you, and it's always joyful? Why was his prayer ministry toward the Philippians filled with joy? Because sometimes our prayers are not really motivated by joy, are they? Sometimes they are motivated by pain, and agony, and things that we see going on in the lives of people that we love. And there's nothing wrong with our prayers being motivated by pain, and agony, and grief. There's a place for that. The longer you walk with the Lord, and the more lives you get involved in, the more that will become a part of your prayer life.

But when Paul thought of the Philippians, and when he prayed for them, his heart was filled with joy. And he tells us why.

There are three reasons he gives.

First, because of their partnership in the gospel.

Verse 5, "*because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.*"

That word, partnership, can also be translated, "fellowship". It comes from the Greek word, *koinonia*. It means that which we have in common, or that which we share. The term fellowship is a rich biblical word that, sadly, too often is lost. The meaning of it is lost in our churches because we talk about fellowship dinners, and a Fellowship Hall, and we talked about going golfing with one another and having great fellowship, and we talk about a knitting together. And we say, wasn't that great fellowship? Fellowship has been minimized to simply socializing with people you like to be around. That's not biblically what fellowship means.

Fellowship is the sharing of that which we have in common which is Christ. Christ is what unites us, and it is the unity that we have in Christ that then puts all these other issues where they belong, as being secondary issues in our lives. Why? Because if we love the same Savior then we can love one another, and we can have fellowship, a deep sense of community. Sacrificing for one another's needs. Loving one another. Praying for one another. Praying *with* one another. Praying with one another can be a massive encouragement to someone's heart!

I would like to challenge us as a church to go beyond saying, I'm praying for you, to: can I come over and pray with you tonight? Can I stop by your work and we'll just run out your car and pray together? There is something remarkable that God does in our hearts when we pray with one another.

Their partnership in the gospel, their fellowship in the gospel, caused Paul to feel so much joy in his heart, and that led him to thank God for them. And he says, it's from the first day until now. From the first day, which was when the church was born. We looked at that last week in Acts 16. And when God called the apostle to the area of Macedonia, and there the church of Philippi was born. How? The Holy Spirit led those church planting missionaries to a riverside where they took part in a women's prayer gathering. Lydia was saved by the power of God. Later the Philippian jailor was saved. A demon was cast out of a young woman who was making a lot of people a lot of money, and so there was a bunch of turmoil that started up. And that was the first day, when the gospel came to Philippi. That's what he's talking about.

From that day until now, Paul says, you have participated with me in the gospel. First, by responding to the gospel. But now also in your giving. He mentions that in Chapter 4. Look it in your Bible. In chapter 4 and verse 15 he says, *"And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only."*

In the whole region of Macedonia, the church of Philippi was the only church that said, Paul, we love you, and we love the work of grace that God is doing among us in the gospel so much that we want other people to experience it. And so, we're going to send you money as often as we can, that this work may continue. It says, *"Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift,"* verse 17. It's not the money, *"but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit."*

Paul says, I want you to be a giving church because I know that you receive massive quantities of fruitfulness from God as a result! Did you know that when you give to the work of the Lord financially, you are investing in an account, the Lord's account, and it's an account that bears fruit? Fruit that goes far above and beyond the fruit that any of the stocks in the stock market will ever produce! Paul says, I *yearn* for that increase to your credit!

"I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."

This was their partnership – one of the ways that they partnered with Paul in the gospel. They also prayed for him. He mentions that in chapter 2. They had fellowship with the Apostle around the gospel even though they rarely ever saw each other. Isn't that interesting? We can have fellowship with believers on the other side of the world that we've never met.

Taryl and Suzy had the privilege in last two weeks to go and meet people that we have been praying for, for how many years as church? Since 2002, when we sent missionaries to Thailand for the translation of the Bible into the Laho Shi language. For 14 years folks! Listen, 14 years you've been giving and praying for people you never met and may never meet until heaven. And there was something going on while you were doing that. There were missionaries working their tails off to get the translation done. And there was credit being accounted to you. This kind of credit: eternal fruit. Isn't that great?

See, every Christian is called to be a part of worldwide gospel ministry. Some are called to go, some are called the stay and support those who go, but every single person, every single believer is involved. It's a partnership, it's a fellowship. And that made Paul so thankful, and filled him with so much joy.

Secondly, notice the confidence in God's work.

Verse 6, *“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”* So, Paul says the same God who began the good work of salvation in you, when the gospel was brought to Philippi, is the God who is going to bring it to completion. The same God who started your salvation is working your sanctification, and your glorification, to its full completion.

That verse is remarkable isn't it? Who began your Christian life? Who began it? God did. And who will finish your Christian life? God will. Does that mean we're passive in the process? No, not at all! We're very active. But we're active only because of the grace of God that first initiated everything.

What a great comfort to know that God did not save us by his grace, and then say, you can fend for yourselves until heaven. You're on your own buddy! Try and work it out. Try to figure it out. He didn't say that! He who began a good work in you will continue it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Isn't that what Paul said in Romans 8:28-29? *“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom He foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”*

It's an unbroken chain, starting with the sovereign, gracious work of God in predestination, leading to calling, leading to justification, leading to glorification. That's what Paul is saying to these believers. He's saying, the God who began his work in you, the moment the gospel came

to Philippi and Lydia was saved at their prayer meeting, is the God who's going to continue to carry out his plan all the way to glorification. What's glorification? That's when everything will be complete in us, and we will see the Lord Jesus face to face, and we will be like him. What a great day that's going to be, right? Until then, it's a journey. Until then, it's a struggle. Until then, it's a fight for righteousness in faith.

But we've read the last chapter! We know who wins! It's okay once in a while to read the last chapter first. When you get discouraged, just pick up God's book and read the last chapter. I won't scold you for doing that! See who wins. All glory to Him! It's *God* who began this work.

I love what F.B. Myers said in his commentary. He said, "No pastor, no mother, no teacher began it, but in the depth of our heart, by his Holy Spirit, God laid the first foundation stone of the new life. And amid all our sins, failures, and backslidings, he has been building up the work he commenced, and he cannot leave it."

I love that! It doesn't say, he *will* not leave it, though that is also true, but he *cannot* leave it. Why is that? Because, in Christ, God has made a covenant with us to take us to the end. He who began a good work *will* bring it to completion.

See, believers persevere. They persevere because God perseveres. It's just a simple way to understand it.

There's two days mentioned in verse 6: the day the work of God began in you, and the day the work of God will be finished in you. In between those two days, God is working. Isn't that great? He's working!

Sometimes we look at our own lives and we feel like we take two steps forward and three steps back, and you say, what in the world? Is there any progress going to be made? Go back to Philippians 1:6 and say, yes, God is going to finish it. There are bumps and there are valleys, but he's faithful!

There's a third reason: affection in his heart.

Look at verses 7 and 8. Another reason he's filled with joy when he prays for them is because of the affection that is in his heart for these believers.

"It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

So, notice that the affection they have for one another here is rooted in the fact that, first, they have a common fellowship, they have experienced the grace of God in Christ, but it's even more than that. Paul says, you have become partakers with me of grace in my imprisonment, and then in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. See, the bonds of their affection for one another were cemented in trials, in suffering. The stigma of being a suffering Christian

exposes your fair-weather friends and reveals to you those who possess true Christ-like love that endures.

That was the case for Paul when he was thrown in prison. When he suffered, his so-called friends fled to the point where he says in Philippians, I've only got Timothy. I've only got this one guy who's really with me in heart, and spirit, and soul. In his last letter he writes, 2 Timothy, he says they've all deserted me. But that's the way it was with Jesus, too, right? So, don't be surprised, don't be surprised.

See, the prayers that you bring before the Lord for one another in times of trial bond your hearts together. When you pray for someone who's in the midst of a trial, your heart is knit with them. And that leads to a relationship that bears the fruit of spiritual refreshment and joy. And those believers become your closest friends, because they have walked through deep, dark, long, foggy valleys of suffering with you! We need to be there for one another. We need to be there for one another. Not to be the "answer man" and the "answer women," to always have the right thing to say. Sometimes just to hold one another's hand and walk through the valley praying. We don't have to have all the answers. We *don't* have all the answers, but we know the one who does! And we can pray to the one who does.

That kind of fellowship, rooted in such Christ-centered truth, is what bonded these believers to Paul. And Paul had deep affection in his heart for them. So, it was their partnership in the gospel, it was God's work in them, and it was the affection in his heart, that caused him to pray with joy.

Look at verse 9 now. Look at the request. There is one request Paul makes in his prayer.

"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment." Basically one request: **that they abound in love**. But he defines it carefully as true biblical love. It's not a mushy-gushy sentimentalism. It's a love that is mixed with knowledge and discernment. Really in effect what he's praying for is spiritual maturity. The spiritually mature person is a person who is filled with love for other believers, but also care in discernment and knowledge.

So, the love that he's praying for here is that First Corinthians kind of love, that First Corinthians 13 "love chapter" kind of love. The love that rejoices with the truth. Biblical love is always mixed together with truth. Remember that. It's not the mushy-gushy feeling stuff the world tries to sell to us. Love is not a *feeling*. Love is a reality that's mixed with truth. It's an action. It's a heart.

See, Paul knows that love is the greatest of all virtues. And only because he wrote First Corinthians 13, which says, "The greatest of these is love." But in Colossians 3:14 he said, "above all these things put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony." That's at the end of a list of all kinds of virtues that we are supposed to put on. He says, above all

those things put on love. Why? Because love is that which binds everything together in perfect harmony. It's the picture of a belt. It holds it all together. Love is the belt.

So, he says, put on all these other items of clothing: gentleness, humility, kindness, forgiveness. And then wrap it all together and tie it tight with love. That's the picture. Love is that which holds all those virtues together in harmony.

And it's interesting that he mentions this in the first chapter, because he's going to have to address this issue later in chapter 4, when he specifically has to say there are two ladies in your church who are not getting along. They are not living in harmony. And he says, urge them to do so. Urge them to love Christ, and to love each other, and to live in harmony. Or chapter 2, "be of the same mind."

It's a beautiful word, "harmony". It's a musical term, as you know. If you have ever had any music theory education, you know there are three parts to every piece of music. There is melody, harmony, and rhythm. Melody is dominant always. It's the tune. It's the message. Harmony is the cord structure that supports the melody. And rhythm is that which carries the melody along to the resolve, to the end.

These ladies were not blending well in harmony – their lives, their attitudes toward each other. And we are called as a local body to live in harmony with one another. Why? Because it brings glory to Christ and furthers the work of the gospel. How desperately you and I need this kind of love, don't we? No matter how long we've known Christ, we can and should say, Lord, there's so much more love that I need in my heart. So much more love that I need. Cause your love in me to abound.

What's the result of that? What's the result of having that kind of love? Discernment.

Verses 10 and 11, "*so that you may approve what is excellent.*" That's discernment. Approve what is excellent. Christians are called to be discerning people. We are called to judge all things – to test the spirits to see what is from God, because not all teachings come from God. John said there are many antichrists in the world – little "a". Many "little a" antichrists – people who are promoting gospels that are different from the biblical gospel. So, Paul says, I want you to be filled with this discerning kind of love, so that you may approve it is excellent. The whole point of discernment is to approve that which is excellent.

There are many so-called "discernment ministries" out there that spend all their time attacking people for the things they're not saying quite rightly, even though these people often are promoters of the true gospel. Discernment doesn't have as its goal to propagate knowledge of error. Though that is beneficial at times. We *do* need to know what's wrong with teachings. But the whole point of it is so that we might lift higher the truth. Approve that which is excellent. To lift high the truth of the Word of God.

Ephesians 5 verse 10 says we are to walk as children of the light. And as a result, to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. So, "Lord, help us to grow in love, that we might discern what is pleasing to you." That's how we need to be praying for ourselves, for one another.

And then, another result is integrity.

Verse 10: "*and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.*" The word "pure" is sometimes translated, "sincere," which is actually from the Latin word which means, from two words: "sine" and "cera," meaning literally, "without wax." Sincere – without wax.

And the meaning behind that, or the illustration behind that, is that in the ancient day, they had very fine porcelain that had to be fired in the kilns very, very carefully, because it had a tendency of coming out of the kilns with very fine cracks. And so, what the dealers of this porcelain would do is they would use wax – a pearly-white wax – to fill in those cracks. And to the average person in the store, you couldn't see any of those flaws. But if you picked up that teacup and you held it up to the sun, the sun would reveal the cracks. And *our* lives are to be without wax. And when our lives are held up to the light, there aren't all kinds of cracks that have been carefully filled in with wax in order to impress others.

There's hypocrisy in every one of our lives isn't there? Not a single one of us in this room is always, 24/7, who we say we are. But we should be praying that we would be more and more sincere, more and more without wax, more and more real with one another, transparent with one another.

I know it takes great risk. And the risk of transparency does bring great pain into our lives, but the fruit, in time, outweighs the pain. Those are the kinds of relationships that we need to have with one another. To be sincere and blameless. It doesn't mean sinless, but it means that our lives contain no obvious stain of sin that the enemies of the gospel would just clap their hands and say, yes, another Christian to take down! So that we would be this way for the day of Christ, when the Lord Jesus returns, as John said, that when he appears, we may have confidence.

And then fruitfulness. Finally, the final result, verse 11: fruitfulness.

That you would be "*filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*"

The fruit of righteousness. So, he's not talking about having righteousness, but the fruit *of* righteousness. Because, as believers, we already have the righteousness of Christ, that's a gift of God received through faith, right? But that that righteousness that we possess in Christ then bears fruit. The Holy Spirit produces this fruit of righteousness as we submit our lives to the Word of God.

The author of Hebrews says that sometimes God produces this righteousness, this kind of fruit in our lives, through discipline. Hebrews 12:11 says, "*For the moment all discipline seems*

painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

God wants to train us in righteousness. He is our training coach, you might say, always thinking of how to train us to be more effective for him, more glorifying to his name. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. See, Paul, later in chapter 3, will tell us how God convicted him and brought him to the point of realizing that righteousness only comes through Christ. And now he's saying to these believers, you have the righteousness of Christ already. Now I pray that you will be filled with the fruit of it.

Do you see how indispensable prayer is in all of this? How indispensable prayer is to our spiritual growth and to our spiritual joy? Prayer is indispensable here at Cornerstone. It is an indispensable part of the Lord's work here. So, let's learn from the apostle. Let's make prayer a priority, and then let's pray with the same kinds of priorities. That God would do a work of grace and continued building of faith, and love, and fruitfulness in our lives. Because what will this lead to? At the end of verse 11, *"to the glory and praise of God."* That's the end. That's where it's all leading. We must learn to pray this way for one another. Why? Because in the end God is glorified. And that's what it's all about, right? It's all about the glory of God. It's not about our comfort. It's not about our glory, certainly. It's about *his* glory. So, let's learn to pray as the apostle prayed.

Let's pray.

Father, I thank you so much this morning for the gospel coming here to Mayfield Heights, and for planting of this church. Thank you for that day that this church was born. That the testimony of the gospel we now know of as Cornerstone Community Church, it was born by you through the power of the gospel. And you are doing a work here among our hearts. You're doing a work through the missionaries that we support. And I thank you, Father, thank you Lord for missionaries. I thank you for everyone here who faithfully participates in the work of the gospel in some way, Lord, whether it be through giving, or serving, or praying, or teaching, the list goes on and on, Lord, as we learn to serve you and to love one another. And Father, I pray for my dear Cornerstone family. Lord, the same way that the Apostle Paul prayed for the Philippians, O God, I pray, that your love in us would abound more and more. That the love of the brethren here would abound in real knowledge and discernment. And Father, that we may learn to approve what is excellent. That growth toward spiritual maturity among us, Lord, would not lead to spiritual pride. Oh God, I pray that we would not grow so as to look down our long noses at other people. I pray, Father, that would be humble like Christ. We will discern error when we need to and cast it aside, but then to approve and exalt that which is excellent. I pray Father, we will be sincere and blameless at the day of Christ when the Lord Jesus returns. Lord, help us to wake up each morning knowing that the reality of the immanency of his return, that it could be today, Lord. Could be today that Jesus comes again. Fill our hearts and our lips with love for you and knowledge of the gospel. Father, we pray that you develop the fruit of righteousness in us. Thank you, Father, that righteousness is a gift from the Lord Jesus. When we come to Him

by faith, he takes all of our sins away, and he gives us his righteousness in its place. And we now stand justified before you. But Father there is in your plan an outworking of that internal state of being righteous, that you want to work it out in the fruit of righteousness. And so I pray that our love would be abounding more and more in this kind of discernment and integrity and fruitfulness. We pray this Lord, not so that we can pat ourselves on the back, and say, my what good Christians we've become, but that we might cast all of our crowns at your feet one day and say it's all been for your glory, Lord. So, work in our hearts, Lord, that we might always be thinking about what our part is, that the name of Jesus may be lifted up throughout the world, and you will be glorified. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

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Delight in the Word is a radio ministry of
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