

Philippians 1:1-11

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- [0 : 00] Good morning, my name's Tim. I'm one of the interns here, just in case you don't know me. And I have the great privilege and the terrifying prospect of opening the word to you this morning.
- Before we get there, I wonder if we could have a thought about what makes a good friend. I have seldom few, so I decided to consult Google during this week.
- And here are some of the results that I found. They are to be honest and trustworthy people, dependable and supportive, generous and optimistic.
- One site said that they should support you no matter what, that they should never judge you, but that they would tell you the truth even when it was hard.
- At this point, I concluded that being a friend was a rather hard job. Loyalty came up a lot in the results, as did enjoying their company.
- [1 : 05] And surprisingly often, the idea of crying when you cry came up as a positive for a friend. Better than laughing when you cry, I suppose.
- But there is often a caveat that friendship is a two-way street. And if it isn't working out for you, if they're letting you down, if they're holding you back, well, it just might not be worth the effort.
- Perhaps, certainly it is foolish to seek advice on friendship from Google. Please do not do it. But I wonder what you would rank as necessary for a good friend.
- I wonder what you think is the kind of top attribute for someone who is going to live alongside you, who is going to help you in life, who you're going to spend time with.
- Because our passage this morning, as we've just heard, is a letter from Paul, a missionary to some of his friends who formed the church in Philippi.
- [2 : 25] These are people that he evidently cares for. And as we dig into the passage today, I hope that we will see that coming out. And so let's pray together just as we come to the word and start to dig in to what God has to say to us this morning.
- Father God, we thank you for the worship that we've been able to share in together. We thank you for so many of these great truths about you.
- That you are a worthy God, a sovereign God. A God who sits upon the throne. That you are one who is supreme and sovereign.
- And yet you care for us. And yet you work in our lives. And yet you humble yourself.
- You condescend even to speak to us. And as we dig into this incredible passage this morning, we pray that you by your spirit would speak life to us.
- [3 : 34] That we would be encouraged and challenged and built up. And that we would go from here full of the joy of knowing you.
- And so we pray for these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Right. First of all, Paul's prayer is passionate. Paul's prayer is passionate.

I hope that you see that in the verses that we read already. And we should take a wee while just to notice this. Paul is incredibly positive. Did you notice? Despite the situation and everything that's going on.

Remember back to last week. Paul is in prison. This isn't Paul on a cushy yacht in the middle of the Mediterranean. This is Paul writing from the depths of a Roman jail.

And maybe it's feeling a little bit like déjà vu. Remember last week we also saw that Paul spent time in a Philippian jail. But he's still positive.

[4 : 39] He's still praising God. He's still thanking God. And such a challenge that is to me. How can he think this way?

This doesn't make sense. But as we see as the letter progresses. Perhaps even next week we'll notice. That Paul's imprisonment is being used by God to further his gospel message.

This positivity is clearest in Paul's joy. Did you notice it as we read the passage together? This joy is a recurring theme throughout Philipians.

And I wonder if that fits with our ideas of who Paul is. Quite often he's characterized as some sort of a grouch. A bit of a killjoy.

Always setting down the intellectual challenge. But never having much life about him. I don't think that's a fair characterization. Paul was an advocate of Christian joy.

[5 : 45] And we ought to be joyful people. I stand and I look on some of your faces. And I wonder if that's true. But we should be filled with joy.

Now be careful. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that we must be superficially happy all the time. I'm in no way advocating that you should come to church.

Or go through life wearing a mask. Smiling your way even when you're weeping on the inside. No, that is awful.

We don't need to grin like Cheshire cats 24 hours a day. And maybe for you a single smile is hard today. Maybe in your circumstances happiness seems a long distance from where you are.

But a healthy Christian experience is marked by a deep and abiding joy. That is rooted in God.

[6 : 54] And that is sure and steadfast. Not fleeting with our circumstances. This depth of passion is further seen in the way that Paul describes his feelings towards them.

There were a few phrases. Did you notice he says that he has them in his heart? That's incredibly intimate language, isn't it? He carries these dear Christian brothers and sisters with him.

Again, don't mistake this as something purely emotional. When we read the word feel here, perhaps our English is letting us down a little. It means to have a mindset that is worked out into action.

We find the same word in chapter 3 verse 15 where we're encouraged to take the same view as Paul. And in chapter 2 verse 2 where we're instructed to be like-minded.

It's exactly the same word, exactly the same idea behind it. And so Paul is thinking and feeling for these people. And it's working its way out into his prayers and into his actions.

[8 : 09] We would perhaps say in vernacular, they were on Paul's mind. And as one person quipped, not on his nerves. I quite like that.

And notice another phrase that he uses. He talks of having the affection of Christ for them. Now, maybe that seems like a small thing.

But just wonder about that phrase for a moment. If you're a Christian here today, or even if you're not, to have the affection that Christ has for some of his people.

The affection that drove Christ from heaven into this world to live and to die. To have that affection, that love, that care for people.

I doubt that Paul just penned those words lightly as a wee sign off at the end of his phrase. That's incredible passion that Paul is writing with here.

[9 : 18] Paul's also remembering as he prays. What he's praying and thinking is based on a shared experience. And this seems to heighten the passion that Paul has for these people.

It's natural, isn't it? We can turn to some of the other letters where Paul is talking to people who he's never met. And that's incredible.

But it stands to sense that here, for these people, he has a special passion. A special care. A special love.

Because remember, these are the first fruit that he has seen in Europe. This is the first little church that he's seen established by his ministry in this great continent that we are part of.

And notice that our little passage opens with Paul thanking God for them. Despite the problems that we're going to find out about later in our series, Paul recognizes that both the initial creation and the continued existence of this group in Philippi was God's work.

[10 : 35] Paul had no illusion of grandeur. He knew that although he was the instrument that God used, it was God who attracted them to himself.

A couple of years ago, a young man came to me on a Friday morning. I think it was the previous evening that his friend had come and given his life to the Lord.

And now this lad wanted to talk. And the butterfly started to go in my stomach. Oh dear, what's going to come out now? He told me that he wanted to follow Jesus too.

I was ecstatic. But I had this slight worry in the back of my mind. Perhaps he just wanted to fit in. Perhaps he was just following the crowd.

And so we started to talk it through. We started, I started to probe kind of what he was thinking and where he was coming from. But as we talked, I was convinced that this young man really, truly wanted to follow Jesus as well.

[11 : 51] And so we prayed together. And I left that week on top of the world. I was so happy. Shortly afterward, one of the organizers of the camp gave me either a phone or a text.

And they said that this young man's parent was making it hard for him. And through the various circumstances that I was told about, I just lost hope.

Connections were lost. Further contact with this lad seemed impossible. And to my shame, what few prayers I prayed for him became tokenistic and passionless.

I thought for sure that whatever had happened during that week, whatever had happened during that camp, it would have surely been snuffed out. But about a month ago from today, I got a message from that same camp organizer.

That young man is now 18 and his parent is allowing him to do pretty much whatever he wants. And one of the first things he did with his newfound freedom was to get in touch with the camp organizer and say, I want to come back to camp.

[13 : 16] Friends, don't let discouragement stifle your praying for others. How many, don't let your cynicism and the circumstances that you see smother your prayers for people.

How many of us have neighbors and friends and colleagues and family members. And if we pray for them at all, it is a hopeless mumble. Can I encourage you to pray passionately for these people?

Paul's passion in prayer is such an encouragement to me because Paul is in a bad place. And he's hearing about problems in Philippi.

And yet he is confident that God is able. That needs to be talked about before we can move on from passion. Paul's passion has a foundation of confidence.

Verse 6 is such an incredible verse, isn't it? Let's read it again together. Verse 6. Being confident of this. The foundation of his joy.

[14 : 32] The foundation of his prayers. Being confident of this. That he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

Until the day of Christ Jesus. God began this good work in the Philippian believers. God began this good work in the Lord. And he would keep them going.

Even to that very moment when each one of them would open their eyes and see the face of their Lord. And likewise for you and for me.

And even for my young friend. We can have confidence that God will continue his work. Now this raises a hard question.

And I don't. I can't answer it in the time that we have this morning. But it raises a hard question about those who have claimed to come to faith.

[15 : 34] Who we know and who we love. And yet they have turned their backs and walked away from God. And I don't dare to try and deal with it in two minutes.

Because I will only make a mess. But perhaps we can talk later. Perhaps we can work that through at another time. But can I just encourage you to trust God.

Even in the mess. Even in the pain. Even in the distress. Yes. Can I plead with you to trust God afresh. And to put your trust in Jesus' powerful love.

And in the Father's wisdom. And in the Spirit's continued work. Let us remember who God is. That he holds the universe together.

And that we can be confident in him. Paul's prayer is passionate. Paul's prayer is also based on partnership.

[16 : 43] Paul's prayer is also based on partnership. Do you hear Paul's reason for being joy filled in prayer? There was partnership from the very start.

I always pray with joy. Verse 4. Verse 5. Because of your partnership in the gospel from the very first day until now. Last week we heard how Paul and his companions were welcomed into Lydia's house.

House. The very same moment that the gospel was welcomed into Lydia's heart. The Philippian jailer had an instant response to provide hospitality for these gospel ministers who are in jail.

The very instant that he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. And then we get to chapter 4. And we're going to find that this little church is a serial supporter of the gospel through Paul.

They were a relatively new church. New Christians. No Jewish background. But yet their natural response to the gospel is to help Paul as he shares it with others.

[18 : 01] And this is so necessary. And it gives me great joy to be the one bringing this message to you and talking about gospel partnership. Because I've tasted of it from this church.

As an intern. Before that when I was working in Northern Ireland as a missionary. Even before that when I went to Bible college. I tasted.

I was the recipient of your generosity. And I thank you so much for that. But let's not rest on our laurels.

Let's consider how we can be better partners for those who spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps I can take you back to our opening illustration that maybe seemed a little disjointed.

But allow me to twist those answers that you thought of. And ask rather than what makes a good friend. How are you being a good ministry partner to others?

[19 : 07] Let me put it very simply. Are you a friend to those who go and tell other people about Jesus? This church supports several overseas missionaries.

And perhaps one of them would appreciate a wee email from a friend they never knew they had back home. Wouldn't that be an incredible thing that we could do for them? There's several families that have people involved with gospel work among us.

I'm sure they would be delighted to put you in touch. And to be encouraged to keep going. How good are we at being friends to missionaries and gospel workers who have given their lives to go where we cannot and maybe will never go?

Paul's prayer is based on partnership. Notice also that it's not an individualistic prayer letter. Did you notice how some of the all-encompassing language as we read together?

Did you notice some of the times all was read? About 20 times in the whole letter of Philippians the word all is used. Eight of them are in the first chapter.

[20 : 21] Five of them are in those few letters, those few verses that we read this morning. We're not called to be some loose association of occasionally together individuals.

We're called to be friends. To be partners in the gospel. To be family. We have in this gospel been united with Christ.

And this is utterly crucial as we reach out to the world around us. What a message it would send to our world.

That we as a diverse people would willingly gather. United by Jesus alone. And not just tolerate each other.

But love one another. Maybe you think it's hard to love Tim. I agree with you.

[21 : 27] And I can't get away from him between Sundays. And sometimes you just don't want to be around other people. I get that. But as members we have committed to be part of each other's lives.

And as hard as it may be, we have to strive for this. As Christians, we are a body. And we cannot afford to let that become just some intellectual notion.

As we seek to display God's love to the world. Because the world will know us. Because we love one another. One last idea about partnership.

Paul describes them as those who share in God's grace with him. It's a fascinating little phrase. Because those words would naturally lead us to think that he's talking about the gospel.

That he's talking about us being saved together. That it's us being made Christians together. But that's not at all what Paul is saying. Note what Paul says in verse 7.

[22 : 41] It's right for me to feel this way about all of you. Since I have you in my heart. For whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel.

All of you share in God's grace with me. It's linked to Paul being in prison and making a defense for the gospel.

Now that may be that Paul is referring to the financial support that he's received. He's saying you have supported me as I do this. And therefore you share the grace some way possible.

It may be a reference to the sending of Epaphras. Who is one of these little characters who we're going to meet later on in our series again. And he comes from Philippi to be one of Paul's helpers.

Perhaps. But Paul is saying that their partnership with him in his hard circumstances. Is somehow sharing God's grace between them.

[23 : 53] And so we see that Paul's passionate prayer is based on partnership with the Philippians. And can I repeat my challenge perhaps to some of you who are Christians here today.

Who are you partnering with for the sake of the gospel? And how are you being a good partner to missionaries and to gospel workers who come across your path?

Thirdly, God's prayer had a purpose. Beginning at the end of the prayer. I'm sure you've already noticed this.

The prayer starts in verse 9 and runs through to verse 11. And I'm to be a little bit strange. I'm starting on the bottom and working up. So starting in verse 11. He ends the prayer with a purpose statement.

With an aim statement. What did he want to achieve in all of this? And it's just that last phrase. To the glory and praise of God.

[25 : 04] Paul's aim in praying for the Philippians is that God would be glorified. That God would get the praise. That God would be seen and be recognized as the true God.

If we twisted a different way. The purpose of this prayer is that we would fulfill our purpose here on earth.

Because when we ask the question, what is humanity's purpose? We come to an interesting conclusion.

Perhaps think about that for just a moment. What is humanity's purpose on this earth? Perhaps you don't even think there is one. And therefore everybody's just to try and enjoy themselves as much as they can.

But what is humanity's purpose? If you have an answer in your mind. That answer reveals what or who you worship.

[26 : 14] If you say that humanity's purpose, like the Westminster Shorter Catechism, is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Then you've revealed that God is the person that you worship.

If you say that humanity's purpose is to enjoy themselves, then you're worshiping God. Then you're worshiping humanity. You're worshiping yourself.

If you answer that humanity's purpose is to enjoy this earth and to make it last as long as we possibly can, we're worshiping the earth.

But Paul worships God. And so the end of his argument, the end of his reason, the end of all his aims, is that God, our God, would be glorified.

Paul has an aim in this prayer that is the basis of our lives on earth.

[27 : 21] But if you're anything like me, that's a bit vague. That's a bit hard to grasp. What are you meant to do with that in your day-to-day life?

How do I glorify God, Paul? Well, let's step back a phrase. We glorify God by being filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

Righteousness is required. Living and speaking and thinking in ways that are consistent to God's plan for us. But before you go and attempt to muster up your own righteousness, notice the source.

Paul is not praying that God would prod these Christians into trying harder. No. The righteousness that they need comes through Jesus Christ.

And they're to be filled with it. Full of it. Overflowing with it, perhaps. It's not their job to marshal their energy and to exert themselves in a lifelong process of keeping God happy and following the rules.

[28 : 42] No. Because we would all fail miserably if that was what Paul meant. The last thing that I could possibly wish for is that anyone, any of you or anyone else who I live close to would judge how incredible God is based on my attempts to be good.

That is the last thing that I would ever wish for. No. As Christians, we believe that we are not good in and of ourselves.

It's the heart of the gospel. That we are broken beings with a problem that strikes to our very core. We need a spiritual heart transplant.

And no self-help program and no attempt to turn over a new leaf will enable us to be good enough. And our only hope is that someone perfect would pay our infinite debt.

And it's only in Jesus that we find someone perfect. And he was willing to pay our debt and he died for us.

[30 : 08] And then he rose again to prove to us that there is hope for every one of us if only we follow him and trust in him and trust in his righteousness.

And as we live trusting in his righteousness we will become more and more like Jesus. And that sounds like something that might just show God's greatness as you and I live with ever increasing likeness to our Lord.

But again, I wonder what does this look like? How does this happen in my life? Stepping back again Paul is using this idea of being filled with the fruit of righteousness as another way of talking about purity and blamelessness.

Purity and blamelessness. He uses these two words to talk about different spheres of what it means to be righteous.

Purity is internal. It's what we think. It's what our attitudes are. Blamelessness, on the other hand, is an external aspect.

[31 : 33] It's how we deal with people. It's how we act. It's what we say. I notice that Paul's mind isn't particularly on today.

Paul is hoping that these Christians will be pure and blameless for that day when Jesus comes back. This is of great importance to us. Not that we would be able to say look how well I did God.

Aren't you impressed? Look at my purity. Look at my blamelessness. Don't you want to give me a better seat at the table? No. No. But that when we are before Him, we would not be in any way ashamed as how we've used the life that He has given us.

That we would be able to stand trusting in Jesus' righteousness but able to say, I used this life well and I followed your Son.

But again, again I ask the question, how does this happen? How does this work? And we read back again and we find that this purity and this blamelessness, it comes from discernment.

[32 : 48] That is, we need to be able to make good choices to decide what is the right response in a given situation. And those of us who are Christians are in desperate need of this sort of wisdom, aren't we?

To be able to humbly and wisely live out our Christian faith before people who do not know God. Discernment is what we see epitomized in Jesus when He, rather than answering a question, asks a question and exposes people's hearts so that He's then able to speak words of power and life into a situation.

Discernment is what we see exemplified when Paul, he has an opportunity to run from the Philippian jail but he doesn't, he stays put and gets an incredible opportunity to preach the gospel to this jailer.

Discernment isn't just scraping through difficult circumstances with a few grazes but it's trusting the Spirit of God to guide us and lead us in impossible scenarios.

And this again is only available through God working in us. This is a gift. Only if the Spirit has access to every thought and every attitude and every word and every action that we possess, only if He has free reign in all of our lives will we gain this discernment.

[34 : 36] And if you think that sounds rare, I fear that you might be correct. It shouldn't be. Discernment should be exercised by every Christian.

That's why Paul is praying this for this church. He wants them to have it. They need it for how to relate to their unbelieving friends and family.

They need discernment to know what to do as a church. They need discernment to talk to the authorities, to speak about Christ in the public square.

But I fear that as Christians today we have failed to recognize discernment as a gift. And perhaps it's atrophied in many of our lives.

where does this discernment come from? We've said it's from God but how do we exercise it? If my assessment is correct what can we do to exercise that atrophied muscle?

[35 : 44] Well it's a strange final step that we make in this prayer. Perhaps you read the passage and you wondered how this verse held together. verse 9 is where we found it.

This is my prayer that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. Paul pulls together love and knowledge and he asks that these two things would grow together.

That the love that they would abound in would be characterized by knowledge and by insight. This discernment that is so necessary it has its roots in love.

It's not a harsh thing it's not a cold thing. Love is the source it's the core it's the very heart of it. But don't buy into the lie of our culture that love is some wishy-washy sentimental feeling please.

Love is based in reality. Love is not blind but rather it sees all of the problems and it chooses to love despite the imperfections.

[37 : 10] This true love is what should mark out every Christian and every church. It is this true love which God has modeled to us perfectly and this is the foundation of all of what has gone before.

But where does that come from? That doesn't sound natural. That doesn't seem to be freely available as I read the news and as I think over my own thoughts and actions for the previous week or day or hour.

Where do we get this love from Paul? Well remember what Paul is doing here. Paul's praying. Paul is asking the most powerful person in the universe to provide for these people.

people. And there we get our answer. This love that we need finds its source in God. And so as we conclude I must ask you two questions.

Firstly do you have a relationship with God? can you go to that God and pray? Are you sure of having a relationship with him?

[38 : 37] Because if you don't or if you aren't sure then this is the incredible news for you. You can be sure.

