

All people want to be happy. That drive underlies most human endeavors. And a key ingredient to happiness is gratitude. Increasingly, the social sciences are recognizing and pushing this fact. For example, a recent Forbes article concludes this way: “Being as consciously and continuously grateful as possible gives you a pathway toward more positivity and contentment.”¹ Gratitude is the new prescription for fighting depression.

But without God, this can only go so far. Another secular psychologist writes, “With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives. In the process, people usually recognize that the source of that goodness lies at least partially outside themselves. As a result, being grateful also helps people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals — whether to other people, nature, or a higher power.”² You see, the challenge for secular science is: to whom are you supposed to be grateful? Here is how GKC put it: “The worst moment for an atheist is when he is really thankful and has no one to thank.” The word gratitude comes from the Latin *gratia*, which means grace or gift. But gift presupposes a giver.

And of all people, Christians should be the most thankful of all. Why would I say that? Because we of all people know how much we need and how much God in Christ has given us. Gratitude is a recognition of indebtedness. God has opened our eyes to see our indebtedness but he hasn't left us indebted. He has paid our debt. Augustine's favorite verse is a favorite of mine: 1 Cor 4:7: “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” The answer is nothing. We do not have anything that we did not receive.

All is gift from the Triune God. He created from nothing. All is sheer gift. Everything. Every breath, every blink, every taste, every smell, from fresh rain to puppy breath. God had no need to create. The Father was perfectly content in the fellowship of the Son and the Spirit, lacking nothing, no deficiency for all eternity. Yet. He created. Out of nothing. And not only did he create out of nothing, he chose to create and redeem a people for himself! Are you kidding me? How wonderful it is to be a Christian. If we kept perspective. If, and friends I confess I lose perspective every hour, but if we kept perspective, we'd be brimming with gratitude all the time.

Thankfulness is one of the things that should set Christians apart from non-Christians. You ever noticed that in Rom 1? Rom 1 is that downward spiral of fallen humanity. It speaks of the wrath of God being revealed against all ungodliness and God giving them over to their own wicked desires. “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God *or give thanks to him*, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools . . .” (1:21-23). They did not give thanks to God. They were ungrateful.

We're in the book of Philippians and remember, Paul is in prison writing the letter to Philippians, yet thankfulness is a key theme of the letter (4:4-7). / Remember how this church got started? Paul was in prison in Philippi and they weren't grumbling but were praying and singing. One can be grateful even with chains on the legs if the heart is in heaven. Yengevy, Moscow, smiling – 2.5 years / This morning we read Paul's prayer of gratitude. (921) **Phil 1:3-8** (this is the Word). Let's consider 5 Ways to pray:

1. Pray frequently 3-4 – Paul prays for all the saints. Not just the overseers and deacons, but the saints. He is always praying. In all my remembrance always in every prayer. In 1 Thess 5:17 God commands us to pray without ceasing. Now, I don't think that means that you are to be constantly praying at all times, but rather that we have a posture of constant prayer. Constant God-mindfulness. So that the Lord is before us at all times. That's what communion with God is. Ever mindful of him. Ps 16: “I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.” Praying regularly throughout the day. Spurgeon said that he rarely prayed for more than 5 minutes but rarely did 5 minutes go by without him praying.

In the words of Brother Lawrence, we need to develop the “holy habit” of communing with God throughout the day, praying always. We are already talking to ourselves throughout the day; you might as well make the chatter useful by directing it toward God. Embrace a full-time surrendered awareness of God in the present moment. Adopt a perpetual

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2021/04/25/gratitude-is-a-key-to-happiness-4-reasons-why/?sh=3303ae5c347c>

² <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>

posture of prayer. Carry everything to him. “O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.” / One practice we can take away from these verses is to be like Paul. **3:17**. Specifically, we can imitate Paul by praying for the saints in this local church. Directory.

2. Pray with joy – “Making my prayer with joy.” Philippians is the epistle of joy. We will see this again and again, mentioned a dozen times in these four chapters.³ Remember where Paul is writing this from? A resort on the Mediterranean? No, a Roman prison. Wait wait wait. Things are not going well for Paul. Dude’s locked up. I wonder if joy would be my main theme if I were writing a letter from jail? I think I’d be belly-aching. Lord, keep working on this flaky heart.

How can he have joy gushing out of this *prison* letter? Because joy is not based on circumstances for Christians. Ultimately, our joy is not in this world, but in another. Our joy is ultimately in the Lord and in the things of the Lord. Friend, if you constantly lack joy it may be worth asking, what are you basing your joy on? If it is on this lousy world, you are sure to lack joy. If it is on health, wealth, or prosperity, those things are like trying to grasp oil with bare hands. Joy will evade you.

You say, how can I be joyful when circumstances are hard? Remember, joy doesn’t come from your willpower. Joy is not something you can muster up. Joy is a *fruit* of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit must work this in you. Your job is to walk by the Spirit. Have the sails up so when the wind of the Spirit blows you are ready to set sail. Walk by the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, and pray! Spirit bear fruit in me! John Stott used to pray this prayer everyday and I have it taped on my bathroom mirror: “Heavenly Father, I pray that this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more. Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” The Spirit produces this joy in the midst of trials.

Why is Paul thankful to God here? He gives a reason **5**. That word “because” like its cousin “for” is a conjunction that introduces the reason, the ground for the statement: I thank my God *because*, I thank God *for this reason*: your gospel partnership. What is that? The Greek word is a familiar one: *koinōnia*. Usually translated “fellowship.” But it often has an economic aspect, which is why the ESV rightly says partnership. The Philippians financially supported Paul and his team of gospel co-workers. The term “partnership” is used 6 times in the letter, which makes sense since this is a thank you letter for their support.⁴

Zoom out here. This local church at Philippi is about a decade old, and they have already raised up leaders: overseers and deacons, and they have become one of Paul’s most supportive churches. Gospel partnership. No doubt this was due in part to Lydia, the wealthy business owner who sold clothing to the wealthy in Philippi. The church needs wealthy generous people to fund ministry. They had it. Paul says they partnered with him from the first day until now: consistent and faithful support of the ministry of gospel promotion. This church cared about gospel advancement and it showed by their finances. / **4:10-20**

Paul uses this word for partnership several other times in other letters too: Rom 15:26: “For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution (*koinōnia*) for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.” Flip back to 2 Cor 8:1-5: “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part (*koinōnia*) in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”

Check this out. These churches of Macedonia, which includes Philippi, are afflicted. A severe test of affliction. Yet they have an abundance of joy. Why? Because for Christians affliction doesn’t mean no joy because our joy is not

³ 1:18, 25, 2:2, 17, 18, 28, 29, 3:1, 4:1, 4, 10.

⁴ 1:5, 7, 2:1, 3:10, 4:14, 15. Three related words: 1:7, 4:14, 15.

circumstantial but based on the solid rock that doesn't move with shifting sand. They are in extreme poverty. Yet, they overflowed in a wealthy of generosity. They gave beyond their means. That is normally irresponsible. They're afflicted and they're broke, yet they are full of joy and they beg Paul for the favor of gospel partnership.

2 Cor 9:10-15: "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution (*koinōnia*) for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"

No wonder Paul gives thanks to God for their partnership. They have become Kingdom Shareholders. You want dividends? You want to invest in something that guarantees returns? You know the stock market seems shaky. I know I know you finance guys are like take the long view. It'll be fine. I am saying take the *real* long view. Matt 6:19-21: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Invest in the eternal.

We pray with joy for the privilege of partnering together for the promotion of the gospel. We share our lives and share our resources that the gospel might go forth. **1:12**. There it is: gospel advancement. That's what we're to be about.

3. Pray and give God the Glory – Paul thanks *God*. Notice that Paul doesn't thank them. They have been supporting Paul and the team, but Paul thanks God, not them. Why? Because it is God at work in them to be about that gospel promotion. God has done the work in their hearts so that they have become generous Kingdom Shareholders so Paul gives credit where credit is due. What do you have that you did not receive?

We can learn how to pray and how to encourage others from Paul here. We thank God for His work in and among Christians. Let's be fruit identifiers. When you see the work of the Spirit in a fellow member's life, give God the glory for it. Sister, I see the Spirit at work in your parenting. Brother, I thank God for you and your gift of encouragement. Let's be quick to identify evidences of grace in one another's lives and thank God publicly. Justin Williams, I thank God for your joy in the Lord. Alex Rodriguez, I thank God for your commitment to the church. Karol Maroney, I thank God for your abundant care for people. Noe Silva, I thank God for your diligent leadership of the deacons. Kristi Wilson, I thank God for your love for the children in this neighborhood. Richard Farmer, I thank God for your example of suffering well. Tex Jackson, I thank God for your love for this church. Pray and give God the glory.

4. Pray the Promises – **6**. I am sure of this. You can take it to the bank. He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion. He finishes what He starts. The good work here is the entire work of salvation. He began this work. In fact, he began it in eternity past. 2 Tim 1:9: He "saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began." He began this good work before the ages began. Eph 1:4: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." Even our faith is a gift of God. We believe because he granted it to us - **1:29**.

The God who started it *will* finish it. Be sure of this, dear saint. God is the initiator and keeper. He is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy. He will hold you fast. We are going to introduce a song in a moment that says this: "When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast, When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast, I could never keep my hold, Through life's fearful path, For my love is often cold, He must hold me fast, He'll not let my soul be lost, His promises shall last, Bought by, Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast."

2:12 – we work because he works. T/ **John 6:37-40**. The Good Shepherd protects his sheep. **John 10:27-30**. **Rom 8:28-39**. We know how the story ends, we will be with you again. Salvation is of the Lord from beginning to end. He is the author

and finisher. Pray with confidence based on the promises of a sovereign God. Your salvation is secured by sweet and sovereign grace.

5. Pray with Affection - 7-8 – It is right for Paul to feel this way. The ESV makes it sound like Paul is talking about his feelings, but he is in fact speaking of something weightier than his feelings. The CSB says “it is right for me think this way about all of you.” This phrase (*touto phronein*) is an important idea in Philippians. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I’ll be translating it as “mindset” throughout this series. This word occurs 26x in NT, 23 in Paul, 9 in Rom, 10 in Phil.⁵ It refers to a mindset: thinking, attitudes, dispositions, and emotions. One author says, “A mindset is a frame of reference, a lens for seeing the world and assessing it. The believer’s mindset is to be shaped by the gospel and by Christ’s own ‘mindset’ (2:5).”⁶ It is a considered disposition that embraces feeling, thought, and will. This mindset is a mental map, a world view. Matt Harmon writes, “The verb speaks of one’s frame of reference for life, what we today might refer to as a world view. It is a way of evaluating the world around us and acting in a manner consistent with that mindset.”⁷

It is right for me to have this *mindset* about you all. Paul loves these people. He holds them in his heart because they are all partakers of grace together. The shared knowledge and experience of grace knits us together. We love each other as brothers and sisters because through Christ God is our father. He yearns for them with the affection of Christ Jesus. This word for affection is *splangchna* – literally, bowels, guts, insides, intestines, the inward parts, but by extension a person’s seat of emotions. In the deepest part of who we are. The affection of Christ Jesus is the affection that comes from Christ. The power of the gospel produces a supernatural affection for other believers. People from different economic, racial, social, political backgrounds all united around the common confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. Brought together to know and love God and for the sake of the advancement of the gospel.

South Side members, do you have this kind of affection for one another? Do you genuinely love one another? As your pastor, I can affirm that you do! I feel like Paul in 1 Thess 4: “Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.” How can we cultivate this kind of affection more and more? In other words, how do we grow as a family? Already mentioned praying for one another. Also serving one another. So often, action on behalf of others forms and shapes your heart towards them. Service increases affection, which is why C.S. Lewis said this, “The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.”⁸

The Philippians partake in grace together both in Paul’s imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. This word “gospel” occurs 9x in Phil, more than any other of Paul’s letters. What is the Gospel? The word simply means good news by itself but in the narrative of Scripture, it is a certain type of good news. It is the good news of God’s restoration of humanity through Jesus Christ. It only makes sense in light of the bad news, which is that we have sinned. God created a good world, mankind rebelled and because of God’s holy character, we deserve judgment. Our sins have separated us from a holy God, but in grace and mercy, God sent his only Son to come and live a perfect life, die a substitutionary death, raise from the dead, and be installed at the right hand of God. If we repent and believe – turn from our sin and self to Christ – we will be forgiven, made new, and ultimately raised from the dead to live and reign with Christ in the new creation.

Notice how in v. 5 he says they partnered with him in the gospel, then in v. 7 he says they are partakers with him in grace. Those words, gospel and grace, are interchangeable, aren’t they? The gospel is the gospel of grace. The good news that though we do not deserve it, God has given us salvation through Christ.

Church, we should be grateful. let’s thank God for each other and for all things. Let’s place our joy in things that will remain unshaken come what may. Let’s bank our joy on realities that will be true in a thousand years. Let’s be Kingdom

⁵ Harmon, 89n54.

⁶ Brown, 66.

⁷ Harmon, 88.

⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 110 in *The Complete C.S. Lewis* (New York: HarperOne, 2002).

shareholders, good gospel partners. Let's pray with gratitude to the God who makes and keeps his promises. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Pilgrim has left the city of destruction and is headed to the celestial city and along the way he comes to the Interpreter's House, who shows him many things: "Then I saw in my dream, that the *Interpreter* took *Christian* by the hand, and led him into a place where was a Fire burning against a wall and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the Fire burn higher and hotter. Then said *Christian*, What means this? The *Interpreter* answered; This Fire is the Work of Grace that is wrought in the heart; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the *Devil*: But in that thou seest the Fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that. So he had him about to the back side of the wall, where he saw a Man with a Vessel of Oil in his hand, of which he did also continually cast (but secretly) into the Fire. Then said *Christian*, What means this? The *Interpreter* answered, This is *Christ*, who continually with the Oil of his Grace maintains the work already begun in the heart: By the means of which, notwithstanding what the Devil can do, the souls of his people prove gracious still. And in that thou sawest, that the Man stood behind the wall to maintain the Fire; this is to teach thee, That it is hard for the Tempted to see how this Work of Grace is maintained in the soul." Church, we may not see it, but there is a man with a vessel of oil in the back – to keep the fire in your heart burning higher and hotter though the devil tries to extinguish it. The oil of his grace maintains the work already begun. He who started a good work will bring it to completion.⁹ Thank God.

⁹ Banner, 29-30.