

Growing in Love: Paul's Prayer for the Philippians- Philippians 1:9-11

Paul's prayer for the Philippian church in Philippians 1:9-11 offers a powerful model for how we should pray for ourselves and our Christian community. Rather than praying for wealth, safety, or health, Paul focuses on something far more transformative: that their love would keep growing in knowledge and discernment.

What Kind of Love Should We Grow In?

Understanding Agape Love

Paul uses the Greek word "agape" when he prays for their love to grow. This isn't just any kind of love - it's a total, self-sacrificing love that puts others first regardless of the cost. Agape love is the kind of love Jesus demonstrated when he went to the cross, bearing the punishment for our sins not out of obligation, but out of complete love for humanity.

This type of love is essential for true Christian fellowship (koinonia). We can't experience deep, authentic community without being willing to sacrificially love one another, even when it's inconvenient or costly.

The Gospel Changes How We Love

The good news of Jesus doesn't just save us - it transforms everything about how we live and love. When we truly understand how God has loved us through Christ, it changes how we approach our relationships with family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. The Gospel shapes our entire perspective on love and relationships.

How Should Our Love Grow?

Growing in Knowledge of God

Paul prays that their love would grow "in knowledge." This isn't just academic knowledge about God - it's intimate, personal knowledge of God's character and nature. Every day we grow closer to God, we're growing in theology, which should naturally lead us to love others more like God loves us.

Our ability to reach our community doesn't start with strategies or programs, but with loving God and growing closer to Him. Like the moon reflects the sun's light, we reflect God's love as we draw nearer to Him.

Growing in Discernment

Knowledge without application is incomplete. Paul also prays for discernment - the ability to take what we know about God and apply it practically in our daily lives. Discernment helps us figure out how to love people in specific situations and how to make wise decisions that honor God.

Every day, we face choices and situations that require wisdom. Growing in discernment means we can "approve the things that are superior" and live in a way that reflects God's character.

Why Does This Growth Matter?

To Be Pure and Blameless

Paul wants the Philippians to stand before Christ pure and blameless when He returns. This isn't about perfection through our own efforts, but about being transformed by God's grace. As we grow in love, knowledge, and discernment, we become more like Jesus - a process called sanctification.

To Bear Fruit and Bring Glory to God

The ultimate purpose of our growth is to be "filled with the fruit of righteousness" and to bring "glory and praise to God." This is the ultimate purpose of our lives - not just to succeed in our careers or achieve personal goals, but to reflect God's character and bring Him glory through how we live and love.

Staying Plugged Into the Power Source

The Lamp Illustration

Think of yourself as a lamp. No matter how beautiful or well-designed a lamp is, it won't give light if it's not plugged into the power source. Similarly, we can't reflect God's love or experience true Christian fellowship if we're not connected to God through prayer, Scripture, and community.

Many Christians wonder why they don't see God moving in their lives or why something feels missing in their faith. Often, it's because they're trying to live the Christian life while "unplugged" from God - not spending time in prayer, not reading Scripture, not participating in Christian community.

The Importance of Christian Community

While we need to be individually connected to God, we also need the stability that comes from being connected to other believers. Christian fellowship (koinonia) acts like a secure outlet that keeps us plugged in and helps us stay on track in our faith journey.

How This Prayer Can Transform Our Prayer Lives

Prayer Should Transform Us

Paul doesn't pray small prayers - he prays boldly for transformation. He asks that their love would "abound more and more." We should pray boldly for God to change us, not just our circumstances. Here are four things we can pray for regularly:

1. That we would experience God's love personally
2. That we would know God's character intimately
3. That we would grow in discernment
4. That we would experience true Christian fellowship

Prayer Is Where We Surrender

Prayer isn't just asking God for things - it's where we lay down our lives and say, "God, you are everything. Whatever you want me to do, I'll do it." This means being open to God's calling on our lives, whether that's in our careers, relationships, or service to others.

Prayer Should Be Kingdom-Driven

We should pray persistently for others to come to know Jesus, even when we don't see immediate results. George Mueller prayed daily for five friends for 52 years - two weren't saved until after his death. This kind of persistent, kingdom-focused prayer is what Paul models and what we're called to practice.

Life Application

This week, commit to praying Paul's prayer for yourself and others. Choose someone in your life who doesn't know Jesus and commit to praying for them daily, regardless of how long it takes to see results.

Ask yourself: Am I "plugged in" to God through regular prayer, Scripture reading, and Christian community? How can I grow in my knowledge of God's character this week? What would it look like for me to love others with the same sacrificial love that Jesus has shown me?

Remember, the goal isn't just personal growth, but becoming someone who reflects God's love so clearly that others are drawn to Him. Your life should be a light that points others to the source of all love - Jesus Christ.

Paul's Philippian Prayer: Small Group Discussion Guide

Summary

Philippians 1:9-11 shows Paul's prayer for the Philippian Church, focusing on how prayer transforms both our relationship with God and our fellowship (koinonia) with others. Paul prays specifically for their love to grow in knowledge and discernment, not just any love, but agape love - the self-sacrificing love that mirrors Christ's love for us. Pastor Daniel emphasized that knowing God isn't about accumulating facts but about intimately understanding God's character, which then enables us to discern how to love others practically. The ultimate goal is bearing fruit and bringing glory to God through transformed lives and deep community.

Intro Prayer

Father God, we come before You this morning asking that You would open our hearts and minds to what You want to teach us through Your Word. Just as Paul prayed for the Philippians' love to grow in knowledge and discernment, we pray that You would help us grow closer to You and to one another. Help us to be receptive to Your Spirit's leading in our discussion today. Guide our conversation and help us to apply what we learn to our daily lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ice Breaker

What's one thing you've learned recently that completely changed how you approach or think about something in your daily life?

Key Verses

1. Philippians 1:9-11
2. Matthew 28:19-20
3. Philippians 1:21-26
4. Philippians 2:5-8

Questions

1. Paul prays for the Philippians' love to 'abound more and more' rather than for their safety or wealth. What does this tell us about Paul's priorities, and how might this challenge our own prayer requests?
2. Pastor Daniel distinguished between different types of love (storge, phileo, agape). Why is agape love specifically necessary for true koinonia (fellowship), and how have you experienced this in your own relationships?
3. Paul prays for love to grow 'in knowledge and every kind of discernment.' How does growing in our knowledge of God's character help us love others better? Can you share an example?

4. Pastor Daniel used the analogy of a lamp needing to be plugged in to give light. In what ways might we be 'unplugged' from God, and what practical steps can we take to stay connected?
5. Paul's prayer focuses on the Philippians being 'pure and blameless' and bearing 'fruit of righteousness.' What does this look like in practical, everyday terms for us as believers?
6. Prayer should transform us, not just our circumstances. How has prayer changed you personally, beyond just answering your requests?
7. George Mueller prayed for his friends' salvation for 52 years, with some not being saved until after his death. How does this challenge our persistence in prayer, especially when we don't see immediate results?
8. The ultimate goal of Paul's prayer is that everything would bring 'glory and praise to God.' How can we evaluate whether our growth and actions are truly bringing glory to God versus serving our own purposes?

Life Application

This week, commit to praying daily for one specific person in your life who doesn't know Jesus. Follow Paul's model by praying not just for their salvation, but that God would give you opportunities to show them agape love - self-sacrificing love that puts their needs above your own convenience. Also, spend time each day asking God to help you grow in knowledge of His character and discernment in how to love others well.

Key Takeaways

1. Prayer transforms both our walk with God and our fellowship (koinonia) with others
2. Paul prays for agape love - self-sacrificing love that mirrors Christ's love for us
3. Growing in knowledge of God's character enables us to discern how to love others practically
4. We must stay 'plugged in' to God through Scripture, prayer, and community to reflect His light
5. The ultimate purpose of our growth is to bear fruit and bring glory and praise to God

Ending Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Paul's example of kingdom-driven prayer that focuses on love, knowledge, and discernment. Help us to be people who pray persistently for others, even when we don't see immediate results. Transform our hearts to love with agape love - the self-sacrificing love that You have shown us through Jesus. Give us discernment to know how to love the people in our lives practically and help us to stay plugged into You so that we can be lights that reflect Your glory. May our growth in knowledge of You result in fruit that brings praise and honor to Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Paul's Philippian Prayer- Daily Devotions

Day 1

Love That Grows

Devotional: Have you ever noticed how love can feel stagnant sometimes? We might love our family, friends, or even God, but that love doesn't seem to deepen or expand. Paul understood something profound about love - it's meant to grow. When he prayed for the Philippian church, he didn't ask for their problems to disappear or their lives to become easier. Instead, he prayed for their love to abound more and more. This isn't just any kind of love Paul is talking about. It's agape love - the kind of love that puts others first, even when it costs us something. It's the love Jesus showed when He chose the cross over His own comfort. This love doesn't come naturally to us; it's something that can only be cultivated and nurtured through our relationship with God. When we allow God to grow our love, something beautiful happens. We begin to see people the way God sees them. That difficult coworker becomes someone God deeply cares about. That family member who frustrates us becomes someone worthy of patience and grace. Our love expands beyond our comfort zone and reaches into places we never thought possible. The amazing thing about growing in love is that it transforms not just how we treat others, but how we experience life. When our love is rooted in God's love for us, we find ourselves living with greater purpose, deeper joy, and authentic community with those around us.

Bible Verse: "And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment," - Philippians 1:9

Reflection Question: In what specific relationship in your life do you sense God calling you to let your love grow deeper, and what would that look like practically?

Quote: Koinonia requires agape love. Koinonia requires that we invest in people. Understand, we love people because God loves them, not because it's convenient.

Prayer: God, I want my love to grow beyond what feels comfortable or convenient. Help me to love others the way You love me - sacrificially, persistently, and without condition. Show me where my love needs to expand and give me the courage to step into that growth. Amen.

Day 2

Knowing God Intimately

Devotional: There's a difference between knowing about someone and truly knowing them. You might know facts about a celebrity - their birthday, their movies, their favorite food - but that doesn't mean you actually know them personally. The same principle applies to our relationship with God. We can memorize Bible verses, attend church regularly, and even teach Sunday School, but still miss the heart of what it means to truly know God. Paul prayed that the Philippians' love would grow in knowledge - not just head knowledge, but intimate, personal understanding of God's character and nature. This kind of knowledge comes from spending time with God, observing how He works, and experiencing His faithfulness in our daily lives. It's the knowledge that comes from a relationship, not just study. When we truly know God's heart, everything changes. We begin to understand why He asks certain things of us. We start to see His love behind His commands. We recognize His voice more clearly when He speaks to us through Scripture, prayer, or circumstances. This intimate knowledge becomes the foundation for how we love others. Think about the people you love most deeply. Your love for them is shaped by knowing their heart, their dreams, their fears, and their character. The same is true with God. As we grow in truly knowing Him, our love for Him deepens, and our ability to love others the way He loves them expands exponentially.

Bible Verse: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” - Mark 1:15

Reflection Question: What is one aspect of God's character that you want to know more intimately, and how might understanding this aspect change the way you approach your relationships?

Quote: Knowing God is not about passing a test. It's not about knowing trivia facts. That's great, but it's not the purpose of knowing God. It's about intimately knowing the character, the very nature of God.

Prayer: Father, I don't want to just know about You - I want to know You personally and intimately. Help me to see Your heart, understand Your character, and experience Your love in deeper ways. Let this knowledge transform how I love and serve others. Amen.

Day 3

Wisdom in Action

Devotional: Knowledge without application is like having a toolbox full of tools but never using them to build anything. Paul understood this, which is why he prayed for the Philippians to grow not just in knowledge, but in discernment. Discernment is what bridges the gap between knowing what's right and actually doing what's right in real-life situations. Every day, we face moments that require discernment. How do we respond to that frustrating email? What do we say to a friend who's making poor choices? How do we handle conflict in our family?

Discernment helps us take what we know about God's character and apply it wisely to these specific situations. Discernment isn't about having all the answers immediately. It's about developing the spiritual sensitivity to recognize what God values in each situation and then having the courage to act on that understanding. Sometimes discernment means speaking truth in love. Other times it means choosing to listen rather than give advice. Sometimes it means extending grace when justice seems more appropriate. The beautiful thing about growing in discernment is that it makes our love more effective. We learn not just to love people, but to love them well. We discover how to encourage without enabling, how to challenge without condemning, and how to serve without creating dependency. This kind of practical wisdom transforms our relationships and makes our love truly life-giving.

Bible Verse: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.” - Philippians 2:3-4

Reflection Question: Think of a current situation where you need wisdom - how might applying what you know about God's character help you respond with both truth and love?

Quote: Discernment is how knowledge becomes practical. Discernment is how we figure out what needs to be done and how we need to love somebody in a certain situation.

Prayer: Lord, give me discernment to know how to love people well in every situation I face. Help me to apply Your truth with wisdom and grace, and to see each moment as an opportunity to reflect Your heart to others. Amen.

Day 4

Staying Connected

Devotional: Have you ever tried to use a lamp that wasn't plugged in? No matter how beautiful the lamp or how bright the bulb, without a connection to the power source, it's useless. The same principle applies to our spiritual lives. We can have all the right intentions, attend all the right meetings, and say all the right words, but without staying connected to God, we'll find ourselves spiritually powerless. Staying connected to God isn't a one-time event - it's a daily choice. It happens through prayer, reading Scripture, participating in Christian community, and maintaining an ongoing conversation with God throughout our day. These aren't just religious activities; they're the lifelines that keep us plugged into our spiritual power source. When we stay connected to God, something amazing happens. We begin to naturally reflect His character. Love flows more easily. Patience comes more readily. Joy becomes more consistent. We don't have to strain to be good Christians; instead, we become conduits of God's love and grace to the world around us. The challenge is that life has a way of gradually unplugging us. Busy schedules, difficult circumstances, and daily distractions can slowly disconnect us from our power source. That's why we need to be intentional about staying plugged in, making our relationship with God the non-negotiable priority that fuels everything else we do.

Bible Verse: “And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, so that you may approve the things that are superior and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.” - Philippians 1:9-11

Reflection Question: What are the signs in your life that indicate you're becoming 'unplugged' from God, and what specific practices help you stay connected to Him?

Quote: We need to plug into God so that we can give off a clear light that reflects the glory of God, just as a lamp gives off light so that we can see. If we are plugged into God, then we give off praise and glory to God.

Prayer: God, I want to stay connected to You every day. Help me to prioritize the practices that keep me plugged into Your power and love. When life gets busy or difficult, remind me that my connection with You is what makes everything else possible. Amen.

Day 5

Living for His Glory

Devotional: What if everything in your life - your job, your relationships, your daily routines, your dreams - was designed for one ultimate purpose? Paul understood this when he prayed that the Philippians would be filled with the fruit of righteousness that brings praise and glory to God. This isn't about adding religious activities to an already busy life; it's about recognizing that every aspect of our lives can become an offering of worship to God. Living for God's glory doesn't mean we have to become pastors or missionaries (though some are called to that- and that may include you). It means approaching our work with integrity, treating our family with love, serving our community with generosity, and handling our resources with wisdom - all because we want to honor God in everything we do. When we live with this perspective, ordinary moments become extraordinary opportunities. A conversation with a neighbor becomes a chance to show God's love. A challenging day at work becomes an opportunity to demonstrate God's peace. A conflict in our family becomes a moment to practice God's forgiveness and grace. The beautiful truth is that when we live for God's glory, we don't lose ourselves - we find ourselves. We discover the purpose we were created for, the joy that comes from living in alignment with God's design, and the satisfaction of knowing that our lives matter in eternal ways. This is the fruit of righteousness that Paul prayed for - a life so connected to God that it naturally produces praise and glory to Him.

Bible Verse: "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." - Philippians 1:21

Reflection Question: How might viewing your current circumstances and relationships as opportunities to bring glory to God change the way you approach this week?

Quote: Cornerstone Church, bringing praise and glory to God is the ultimate purpose of our lives. It's that simple. Get your degree if you're in school, get a good job, work hard. That's all great. By all means, provide for your family. But your ultimate purpose is to bring praise and glory to God and to bear fruit.

Prayer: Father, I want my life to bring You glory in every area. Help me to see each day as an opportunity to honor You through my words, actions, and attitudes. May the fruit of my life be a reflection of Your goodness and love. Amen.