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A Prayer for Maturity
Philippians 1:9-11

Please take your Bible and open to Philippians 1. Thanks for being here tonight. I know when it stays light outside a little longer and the temperature gets above 50 degrees it can be a little harder to stick with the class. I am glad you're here. Tonight we are going to look at another power packed prayer from the apostle Paul. Philippians 1:9-11 is a prayer that the apostle Paul prayed for believers to move us from where we are closer to where we need to be. The title for this lesson is a prayer for maturity.

One thing I hope you are seeing in this class is how much the apostle Paul prayed for local churches. **When you love someone you pray for them.** When you love someone and you have access to the throne of grace you take it and you pray for people you love.

Paul loved the local church so he spent a lot of time praying for local churches. Paul did what he told the local church to do. Paul was devoted to prayer. He prayed without ceasing and his prayers are filled with gratitude because Paul knew when the Lord begins a good work in a person, He never stops working.

I told you about a seminary professor named James Rosscup who taught a class on prayer at The Master's Seminary for many years. He wrote a long book where he explained every single prayer in the Bible. It's called *An Exposition on Prayer: Igniting The Fuel To Flame Our Communication With God*. Again, let that sink in. He went through every single prayer from Genesis to Revelation and studied every prayer in its original historical context.

Here is what he wrote about prayer in Paul's letter to the Philippians, "Some of the most delightful things the Bible says about prayer are in Philippians." What does that mean? There's a lot we can learn about prayer simply by reading a four chapter letter Paul wrote to the believers in Christ in Philippi. If all we had was Philippians and we studied this letter and followed what Paul prays for in this letter, our prayer lives would all be much improved.

I want us to begin our time tonight reading the first 11 verses in Philippians and then we will focus on verses 9-11. Notice how Paul begins this letter with prayer - A greeting and then notice what Paul is thankful for and then notice what Paul prays for.

Philippians 1:1-11

Php 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

- 2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3** I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,
- 4** always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,
- 5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.
- 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.
- 7** 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.
- 8** For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.
- 9** And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,
- 10** so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,
- 11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

That's how this little letter begins. Paul greets the saints in Christ in Philippi and then he tells them what he is thankful for in their lives and then he prays a

specific prayer for their spiritual growth in verses 9-11. Again, this is a basic observation in the text, but I want you to see the connection in verses 8-11. **Paul tells them how much he loves them in verse 8 and then he prays for them in verses 9-11.** True love for other people shows up in a life devoted to prayer. When we love someone we pray for them and when we pray for them we make sure our prayers line up with God's will.

Why does Paul pray for these people this way? Just a reminder of the historical background of the relationship between Paul and this church. Paul was most of their father in the faith. He was the first one to preach the gospel in this area. We read about the start of this church in Acts 16. God the Holy Spirit directed Paul to this region to preach Christ where he had never been preached before. Paul preached Christ in this pagan city where there was no synagogue and God started saving people and adding them to His family.

This church was the first church in Europe. The first church in Europe began with an interesting cast of characters. *If you were drafting a starting line up for the first church in Europe I am not sure you'd start where the Lord started.* The first people we read about hearing the gospel and trusting in Christ for salvation in this city were a Gentile Proselyte lady named Lydia, a pagan Philippian Jailer and his family and a formerly demon possessed teenage girl. That was the Lord's starting lineup for this church.

Here is what we know - God's ways are not our ways. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Sometimes who God chooses to save makes no sense from a human perspective. Why would God choose to save someone who killed Christians? That was Paul's testimony, right? Why would God choose a wealthy lady, a Philippians jailer who had previously considered suicide and a teenage girl with no shortage of issues? Why did God choose to save you and me? Haven't we been learning from Romans on Sunday mornings that we're all in the same sinful spiritual condition? No one deserves to be saved. **God saved us by His grace to put His own glory on display.**

God saved these people to put His glory on display. They were still glorifying God 10 years or so after Paul left the city. They were still glorifying God by participating in the fellowship of the gospel. They heard Paul was in prison and they sent a financial offering to help him with his needs so he could keep preaching Christ. They still cared about Christ and people coming to know Christ. That's good. **Their spiritual antennas were still turned in to the right station spiritually.**

But here is what happened to the believers in Philippi that could happen to any one of us if we are not careful. Over time, lesser things in life took over the most important things in life. They still participated in the work of the gospel, but their participation was not what it once was. Over time they began to drift from gospel priorities. They began to live with misplaced priorities.

Maybe it was because of the ongoing threat of real persecution they faced for following Christ. Look down in Philippians 1:28 and you see Paul mentioning the fact that they had opponents. Verse 29 talks about them suffering for Jesus' sake. It cost them something to align with Christ. Maybe some of them loosened their connection to the local church as a way to cope with persecution. They clearly had external challenges.

Maybe a cause of their drifting was internal challenges. We keep reading the letter and we see that there were people who were legitimately born again who weren't getting along. Unity was a problem in the church. Maybe some of these people were drifting because life is hard enough to begin with and being a part of a local church with people who can't get along just seems like more of a hassle than its worth.

When Paul wrote this letter there was persecution coming to them from outside the church and problems arising inside the church. **A pastor named Chris Mueller writes, "The Philippians were battling with a loss of focus. They**

began to drift into side issues, errant thinking, and divided up against each other. They lost their priorities.” Paul’s goal in this letter is to get these believers back on track.

Do you ever sense that you’re drifting in the Christian life? You still come to church and you still sit under the word and you still give to the church but you go through life with misplaced priorities? Do you ever care too much about things that are passing away? Do you ever start your morning with a devotion and then forget to pray the rest of the day? We all struggle to live consistently with gospel priorities.

Even if you’re prioritizing the right things, you can still benefit from this prayer we are about to study. There’s always room to grow.

Notice the first thing Paul prays for in the first part of verse 9:

1. **Abounding Love - Philippians 1:9a**

Philippians 1:9a, “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.” If we are going to let God reprioritize our lives, it starts with love. That’s the point of all biblical instruction, right? Paul reminded Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:5 that the aim of our charge is love that issues from, a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. God’s agape love is essential for the Christian life.

There are different kinds of love described in Scripture. The love Paul prays for here is the highest form of love. **It means to have love for someone or something based on sincere appreciation and highest regard.** Agape love is what we have all been shown through the gospel. For God so loved the world that He what? He gave. Agape love is supremely demonstrated at the cross where God saw our greatest need and met our greatest need.

One man describes agape love as “**God’s deliberate, self-giving love that is expressed irrespective of a person’s worth or merit.**” Agape love comes from God and flows through the person and work of Christ. 1 John 4:9-10, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” God’s love for us changes our love for Him and for His people. 1 John 4:19, “We love, because He first loved us.”

How do you know you’re born again? One way you know you are born again is that you love the Lord and you love His people. **What you used to care less about is what you care most about.** When God saves us He puts His Spirit into us and the Spirit pours the love of Christ into our hearts and that love spills out. It gushes forth.

We are coming up on summer soon. **We will be trading in our sweaters for swim suits.** Which is quite humbling the older you get. Can I get an amen? I’m sure at some point in your life you have been sitting or standing around a pool in normal clothes watching people swim and someone surprised you and shot you with a water gun. You didn’t ask for it. You were minding your own business and someone out of nowhere shoots you with a water gun and you get a little wet.

You respond by getting up and responding to the shooter and then what happens? They reload their water gun and keep shooting you. By this time you’re a little more wet. Then what happens? You get wet enough that you don’t care what happens to you anymore. **You get so drenched you become dangerous.**

Who is the most dangerous person in a water gun fight? **The most dangerous person in a water gun fight is the person who is most wet.** There comes a point when you get so wet you don’t care anymore about what happens to you. Then you become a freak of nature. You’re on the attack because you don’t care

about yourself anymore or what happens to you. People who are drenched lose all concern for themselves and are only concerned about drenching other people.

What does that have to do with Paul's opening prayer request for the Philippians? *Paul wants believers to be so drenched with the love of Christ that all they are concerned about is loving Christ and loving other people.* Will this always be easy? No. Sometimes other saints can be the hardest people to love well. Paul prays for the Philippians to abound in love because he knew there were at least two people in the church who were not drenching themselves in the love of Christ and loving one another well.

In Philippians 4:2-3 we are introduced to 2 people who had conflict and needed help to work it through. Philippians 4:2-3, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." Evidently, it is possible for two people to be born again and have some things to work through.

But here is what we learn and we know this. **When we work through inevitable conflict biblically with agape love God is glorified and we mature in Christ.** To some degree conflict is a tool God uses to cause us to rely on Him and love one another more. If we know that loving one another is not an option, we will work through our differences biblically if we want to mature in Christ. We will never live with unresolved conflict or avoiding hard conversations.

Paul Billheimer, "The local church may be viewed as a spiritual workshop for the development of agape love. Thus the stresses and strains of a spiritual fellowship offer the ideal situation for the testing and maturing of love...the local congregation is one of the very best laboratories in which individual believers may discover their real spiritual emptiness and begin to grow in agape love."

During the shepherds conference last week I got together with a friend who doesn't attend this church. He told me about a relationship in the church he goes to that is challenging. He struggles to love someone he serves on staff with. He asked me what he should do. What would you tell him? Philippians would be a great place to take him. This prayer would be a great reminder of what God calls us to. If it's not a sin issue, then commit to love him more and more. Love him until you like him.

That's where this prayer for maturity begins. To mature in Christ means we put agape love first. We prioritize love. **We can never love the Lord or one another or the lost too much.** The good news is that we are not on our own to love this way. In his prayer of thanksgiving in Philippians 1:6, Paul reminded this church and us through them that when God begins a good work in our lives He never stops working until the day of Christ. God is always working in a believer's life. He wants us to cooperate by making it our aim to love more and more.

This is a way we can pray for ourselves and for one another. Lord, help me or help _____ fill in the blank with another believer love more and more. Notice Paul doesn't tell us who we are to strive to love more and more. He doesn't put any limits on our love. Paul wants us to love the Lord more and to love each other more and to love lost people more.

How do we do this well? We have the desire to love well if we have the Holy Spirit. Paul prays for us to love well. What do we need to actually do it?

The second priority we see in Paul's prayer is:

2. Anchored Love - Philippians 1:9b

For our love to grow in a way that pleases God, it needs to be guided by something more reliable than ourselves. The kind of love Paul prays for is

connected to truth. It's love that is anchored to truth. Look at the end of verse 9, "with knowledge and all discernment." James Roscup describes this kind of love as love that is "guided and guarded by knowledge and seeing things with wise insight." For our love to glorify God it must be anchored to truth. Notice Paul prays for their love to abound more and more with knowledge.

What does that mean? Love that glorifies God never goes against Scripture. Christ-like love never contradicts the Bible. Paul isn't praying for sloppy agape. Hey, I made that up. Thanks for bearing with me. For our love to abound more and more in ways that please God it has to be guided by something more reliable than our fleeting emotions or what we think is best.

Picture a river. The river is love flowing downstream toward glorifying God. Picture two riverbanks on either side of the river. One is called knowledge and the other is called discernment. Knowledge and discernment keep the river of love flowing in a God glorifying direction.

1 John 5:2-3, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." Do you hear in those verses the connection between love for one another and love for God and obedience to His Word?

The word and the Spirit are the reliable guide to help us abound in love. The more we know God's Word and follow it with the right heart, the more loving we will be. Approving love is anchored to Scripture and Paul says in verse 9 it is discerning. Discernment is where we get the English word "aesthetic" from. **Discernment is moral perception, insight and wisdom.** It refers to the ability to make proper moral decisions in the midst of a vast array of difficult choices and freedoms. Love that pleases God is discerning.

Remember who Paul is praying for? Paul is praying for believers who live in a very pagan city. Philippi was a place Roman Generals retired to. When Paul showed up there in Acts 16 and looked for a synagogue to start preaching Christ there was no synagogue in the city. This city was polluted with pagan idolatry. That's what these people were saved from. Now they were called to live a life of love and to live a life of love they needed guidance. They needed their love to be guided by truth. So do we.

Life presents us with many options. One man says, "Life throws more options at us than Baskin Robbins does ice cream and sometimes we are paralyzed by those choices." Real love desperately needs help to discern what's best in a world of what could be good or better.

Paul prays for love to abound, according to truth and what is best, in order to live God's best. Look at verse 10, "so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ." Here is the goal behind discerning love and approving the best things—it results in us becoming sincere and blameless on the day of the Lord's return. To be sincere is to live pure before God. To live without offense is how we live toward one another. Blameless means to live in such a way as to not cause others to stumble around you. Christians are to live lives of integrity in order to not cause others to sin.

John MacArthur tells the story of a mentally handicapped boy that used to attend Grace Community Church. He was probably in his early 20's but he had the mind of a small child. He loved John MacArthur and would walk up to him after every service at the end of the sermon and tell him how much he loved him. One day he asked for a Bible even though he couldn't read. Dr. MacArthur asked him about that and he said that he can't read but he can follow the numbers so when he says to turn to a specific verse he can look down and find the right verse.

They went and got him a Bible and then one day the young man asked to be baptized. He gave his testimony to the best of his ability and the time came for

him to be baptized. He got in the water in front of the whole church with Dr. MacArthur doing the baptism and Dr. MacArthur asked him if he knew who Jesus Christ was in front of the church. The young man looked up at him and said, "You mean you don't even know that."

It was a glorious time celebrating what God did in his life. What happened to the young man was really sad. His unsaved family members were making fun of him and got him drunk one night against his will. He was so drunk that he got alcohol poisoning and had to go to the emergency room and Dr. MacArthur found out about it. He told that story to the church as a reminder that you have to be careful with what you do with a believer. God cares about His children and what we do with His children. You never want to be the personal cause of a believer's sin. Your goal is to be sincere before God and blameless before His people.

Notice how Paul prays this way with a certain day in view - The day of Christ. Is it Play This is the second time in the first 11 verses in Philippians that Paul has mentioned the day of Christ. He already referred to it back in verse 6. **Paul is redirecting our focus to a major future event.** We pursue love in the truth with the judgment day in view. When Christ comes back we will all stand before the bema seat and our lives will be inspected by our Savior. How we live now matters for that future day.

Paul writes about future events a lot in his letters as a motivation for us to get our spiritual act together. Paul wants Christians to live every day in light of the future day of Christ. People who make the most of their lives for Christ have two days on their calendars - This day and the day of Christ. Martin Luther used to say, "There are only two days on my calendar: **today and the day of judgement.**"

If we know that a future day of judgment is coming we know there needs to be an urgency to the choices we make in this life. Paul wants God's best for the church. D.A. Carson describes it this way, "Clearly, Paul does not want the Philippian believers to be satisfied with mediocrity. He can't be satisfied, in a

fallen world, with the status quo. He wants these believers to move on, to become more and more discerning, proving in their own experience “what is best.” He wants them to pursue what is best in the knowledge of God, what is best in their relationships with other believers, what is best in joyful obedience. For ultimately what he wants from them is perfection: he prays that they “may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.”

Remember these were people who Paul just thanked God for. Paul just thanked God that these people were still participating with him in the furtherance of the gospel. They met Paul’s needs so Paul could keep preaching the gospel. They were still loving, but Paul still prayed for them to do a little better for the kingdom. Our love can always be improving, always growing. **There’s always someone who needs to be loved and there’s always more truth to learn to love that person better.** We can always be a little more sacrificial with our time and resources, a little more tender with saints going through a hard time, giving more of our time to the study of God’s Word so we can make sure how we are loving the Lord is best.

The final part of this prayer request is in verse 11:

Paul prays for:

1. Abounding Love - Philippians 1:9a
2. Anchored Love - Philippians 1:9b-10
3. Attached Love - Philippians 1:11

Philippians 1:11

filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul's prayer request for the saints in Philippi ends with a plea for ongoing fruitfulness. How? Righteousness. Where does righteousness come from? It comes through Jesus Christ. Believers are filled with the fruit of righteousness at the moment of salvation. Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness positionally. But this is not a prayer for positional righteousness. **This is a plea for practical progressive righteousness.** The fruit which a righteous life produces is what Paul prays for.

How do we grow in God glorifying righteousness? Greater dependence on Christ and Scripture. We cannot produce righteousness on our own. Jesus makes this crystal clear in John 15.

John 15:1-5

15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

- 2** Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.
- 3** Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.
- 4** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.
- 5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Greater God glorifying righteousness flows from staying connected to Christ. Someone said in a sermon I recently listened to, "Only God can glorify God." That's interesting. Christ glorified God for us through His life and now He helps us do what He did by staying connected to Him. How do we maintain a close connection to Christ? Prayer. The Word. Fellowship with other believers. Worship. Confession.

We also all know that bearing more fruit requires pruning. This is not a pleasant experience, but a painful and necessary experience. Jesus says in John 15:2 that every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it might be even more fruitful. **God is in the pruning business because that's how much he loves**

us and that's how much He loves His own glory. Pruning is part of God's plan to produce righteousness in us for God's glory.

The goal of this prayer, you'll notice at the end of verse 11, is for who to be glorified? Verse 11 says through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. This is a reminder that if we seek to reprioritize our lives around love that is abounding, anchored to truth and attached to Christ, the point is not self glory. **If we do all this and our goal is to get glory from other people we're idolaters.**

The point of this prayer is not for us to do things in order for people to admire us but for the person and work of Christ to be put on display through our lives for the glory of God. It's not ultimately about us at all. It's about God's agape love flowing through us anchored to truth and us staying connected to Christ so that His character is reproduced in our lives for the glory of God. We want people to see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

God saved us in order for us to be fruitful Christians. Jesus said in John 15:8, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." James Montgomery Boice, "One of the reasons why God has saved us is that we might be fruitful Christians. He has not saved us merely that we might be free from judgment and go to heaven when we die, but that the character of Jesus Christ might be reproduced in us while here on earth. We are to live in the flesh but not of the flesh. We are to do good works that Christ might be glorified and that many might be brought to faith in him."

This is what Paul prays for the Philippians. They needed this prayer and so do we. A mature Christian is a loving believer who lets the Spirit of God lead their lives through Scripture for the glory of God. We are loved to love and our love needs the guidance of God's Word. As we make it our goal to abound in love and anchor our lives to God's Word and stay attached to King Jesus we will walk in the good works God has planned for us and God will get all the glory.

Nothing is more thrilling than seeing God work in our lives this way. Chris Mueller reminds us, “If God is the best person, the best there is, then as we live for His glory, we enjoy the best the universe has to offer. As we enjoy Him more, we will glorify Him more. And as we glorify Him more, we will find even greater joy in Him. Paul prays to the glory of God, because that is the end of all things, the best of all things and the only true motivation for growth and maturity.”

I hope this week, at least after the Indian basketball game is over tonight, you will spend a little more time working back through this prayer. Make sure what Paul prioritizes in prayer is what is your main aim in life. Make this your goal and God will be glorified. Let’s pray.