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Philippians 1:3-11

Discipleship 101: The Praying Disciple

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Have you ever thought about how you might act if you were to meet someone really important? What you would say? How you would talk to them? If I were to meet **Prince William** and **Kate** (formerly Middleton), the Duchess of Cambridge, I'm not sure how I would act. Should I bow or shake their hands? Should I do both at the same time? What should I say to them? How long should I talk to them? This is William and Kate's one big chance to meet me. I want it to go well for them.

A couple years ago Prince William and Kate visited the States and attended a **Cavaliers** game. Afterwards **LeBron James** took this picture with them, which made the **British media** have a **British meltdown**. They were horrified that LeBron James, who hadn't showered after the basketball game, would dare to touch royalty, especially put his arm around Kate. **Piers Morgan**, who is British, and a TV host, said this to LeBron James.

“You do not put your arm around the future queen of England, LeBron James, you may call yourself King James -- you are not a real king. Prince William is going to be my king, that was his wife -- hands off the duchess.”¹

The British media was floored that LeBron James would break **royal protocol** this way. What they didn't know was that LeBron James was just giving the Duchess an **awkward Christian side-hug**. So chances are, if you get the opportunity to meet the **royals**, you probably shouldn't hug them. If you're someone who doesn't like hugs, next time I try to give you one (because I'm a hugger), just say, “I'm royal.”

How should we approach God? Prayer is simply talking to God, right? So we should just talk to him? In the Lord's prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray to “our Father in heaven” (Matt 6:9-13). But if God the Father created everything, and is the true sovereign (Isa 33:22; 64:8)—shouldn't we be **thoughtful** about how we pray?

Today we're studying **how Paul prays** and **what Paul prays for** in Philippians 1:3-11. Now Paul doesn't say, “You need to pray like me” but I think he gives **four ways** disciples, followers of Jesus, should pray, and four things they can pray for. In his letter he gives us a pattern we can follow. So first...

How should we pray?

Sometimes Paul has some pretty harsh words to say when he opens his letters. When he opens his letter to the **Galatians**, he calls them **deserters** because they're abandoning the **gospel**. But when Paul writes to the **Philippians**, although he encourages humility and unity, he has lots of things to be **grateful for** because of them, and that's reflected in his **opening prayer**. How should we pray?

1. Gratefully (v3)

Paul says in v3, “I thank my God every time I remember you.” What is he thankful for?

- There was no church or believers when he arrived in Philippi and now there is—Lydia, the jailer, a demon-possessed girl, a man named Epaphroditus, two women, Euodia and Syntyche, and many more (Acts 16).

¹ Buckingham Palace: No foul on LeBron James for Kate Middleton half hug. http://www.cleveland.com/cavs/index.ssf/2014/12/buckingham_palace_no_foul_on_1.html Published December 12, 2014. Accessed September 14, 2017.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

- The Philippians gave money to support Paul, one of the few churches to do so. (2 Cor 11:9; Phil 4:15)
- They sent Epaphroditus to keep Paul company and care for him while he sits in prison.

So as you can see, Paul has plenty of **reasons** to be grateful. If Paul truly is writing from prison, it would be easy to sit around and feel sorry for himself, but he doesn't. Instead he thanks God for the Philippians.

When I pray, it's so easy for me to immediately launch into a list of ways God can make my life easier. Heavenly Father, would you help me get my **sermon** done? Would you **grow** Cornerstone? Would you fix a **difficult relationship** by changing them (and not me)? What if we started with gratitude first? Heavenly Father, thank you for the **143 sermons** you gave me before this one. Thank you for the **101 members and attenders** coming to Cornerstone. Thank you for the people you have placed in my life to make me **more like Christ**.

I want you to **recall** one request you've prayed for recently that was just you telling God you needed something. Praying our need is a good thing, but can you now **silently pray** the same request in the form of a thank you? "Thank you Father that I have just the right amount of **money** so I need to trust you. Thank you Father for my **health problems** so that I get to look forward to my **resurrected body**. Thank you Father for the **difficult relationship** I have because it's making my pastor more like Christ." We pray gratefully and...

2. Joyfully (v4-5)

In v4 Paul says, "I always pray with joy in my every prayer for all of you" and then in v5 he explains why, "because of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." Joy is a **major theme** in Philippians. Paul is happy because the Philippians have **participated** with him in believing and preaching the gospel. The word for "participation" is the same word for the "fellowship" the **early church** had as they sold property and possessions to care for each other's needs (**Acts 2:42-47**). The Philippians are willing to give up everything to help Paul preach Christ to the world, and it makes Paul so happy.

Have you ever had someone tell you to "be happy" or "be joyful"? How well does that work? I can't tell you to **feel joy** when you pray and expect it to happen. But, I can help you feel joy. Like Paul, let's put ourselves in his shoes for a moment. As we look around at each other, let's **let ourselves feel joy** because of each other's **dedication** to the **gospel**.

Our **row of students** makes me so happy every time I see you here listening and taking notes. Last week at the **farmer's market**, I was so happy people showed up to help out (Bernie, Diane, Karyn, the kids, Sara and Emma, Ann and Jeremy, and Kathy). And everyone who came last week to our **big day**, joy! Today, our kids at the **Spicket River Cleanup** in Lawrence found a homeless man's shelter as they were picking up trash. Because the children's ministry put together those packets with Bibles, granola bars, and toothpaste for the **homeless** last week, they were able to leave one there for the homeless person. Doesn't that get you excited? And how about those of us sharing the gospel with coworkers, family members, and friends on our **frontlines**? **Take a moment** and think of your partners in ministry at Cornerstone, the other people on your ministry teams, your volunteers, people reaching their frontlines, and *allow yourself to be filled with joy*. We pray gratefully and joyfully and...

3. Confidently (v6)

Next Paul writes our **foundation verse**. Would you all say it with me?

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. **Philippians 1:6**

We're supposed to **pray like God is at work**. God is at work in the church at Philippi. If he saved them ten years earlier in 50 AD, he's going to keep at it in 60-62 AD. In fact, Macedonia back then is Greece today. According to the Joshua Project, 88.3% of Greece is now Christian (95% of that is Orthodox, 0.4% evangelical). God is still at work there. If God brought us as a church into being, he's going to keep working in us. There's nothing that life or circumstances can throw at us that will destroy God's work in Westford. This building literally collapsed in 2001, and God is still at work here with a brand new church! *Pray like God is at work in us, and like God is at work in you.*

The **Transcontinental Railroad** took six years to build. Some of those days, when the going was good, the track flew down mile after mile across the plains. But other days, the construction crews ran into Sierra Nevada Mountains and they literally had to take a hammer and chisel, pound a $\frac{3}{4}$ **inch hole four-feet deep** in the rock face, pack it with explosives, and blow a few feet further into the tunnel. Now in our illustration, you're not the miner. You're the **caboose**. Day by day God is laying your track and leading you forward. Some days you'll rush ahead and life will be easy; but other days you'll have to patiently wait on God as he moves your life forward in him inch by inch. God made the mountains. He can take you through them. *Because God is at work, we pray gratefully, joyfully, and confidently; and finally...*

4. Affectionately (v7-8)

Paul says it's right for him "To feel this way about all of you" because he has them in his "heart"; and so it doesn't matter if he's imprisoned in chains because they're sharing in God's grace with him. Then he says in v8, "God can testify how I long for all of you with the **affection of Christ Jesus**." This word for "affection" is likely my **favorite word** in the book of Philippians. It's the Greek word "**splanchnon**" and technically, it means "**intestines**." In **Acts 1:18** it says "Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his **intestines** spilled out." That's the same word as "affection" in our verse!

Can you imagine receiving a **Hallmark card** from your special someone on **Valentine's Day**. Instead of being covered in red and pink hearts, it's covered in red and pink intestines. You open it up and it says, "Baby, I love you so much my intestines hurt." It's time to have a serious talk with your spouse! Paul is literally saying "I long for you with the **intestines of Christ Jesus!**" And that makes sense in their culture. *At that time they thought the bowels were the seat of emotion and intensity. Their bowels were their core like our heart is our core today.* So really, he's saying, "I long for you with the **heart of Christ Jesus!**"

When we begin to pray for people, what does it do? Prayer **engages our hearts**. It helps us care about each other. As we pray, let's ask God to grow our affection, our feelings, our love, our hearts for those people we're praying for. So when we pray for each other in **church, small group**, or through the **prayer network**, those are moments we can cultivate the love in our hearts for each other (don't rush through them).

How should we pray? Gratefully. Joyfully. Confidently. Affectionately. Pray like God is at work. But I haven't even begun to explain what we are called to pray for. If you met **Prince William**, and he said, "I'll grant whatever you ask for?" What would you ask for? More importantly, what should we ask God for?

What should we pray for?

Paul says how he's been praying, and then he prays for them, **modeling** what we can pray for.

1. Love (v9)

Paul writes in v9, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight." *Paul prays with love that they would grow in their love for God and each other.* In **Ephesians 4:13**, Paul encourages the **church** to grow in "the knowledge of the Son of God" (cf. Col 1:19). And if we

look at the **themes** in Philippians, humility, unity, joy, I think Paul is also praying for them to love each other more. Paul is praying something like this, “Heavenly Father, would the Philippians fall more in **love** with **you** because they **know** you. Father, may their love for you **extend** to those around them. May they love you, their **church family**, and may they love the **lost** by boldly sharing the gospel.”

When we pray, **let’s pray**, “Heavenly Father, would our **church**, our **families**, **ourselves**, fall more and more in **love with you** because we’re coming to **know** you better. Would this **love** for you **extend** around us to our church family and each other, **pressing outward** beyond our doors and parking-lot into **Westford** and our frontlines. Father help us love you and others through Jesus. Amen.” *Pray for love and...*

2. Discernment (v10)

In v10, Paul prays, “so that you may be able to discern what is best...” If God is at **work**, and we can pray like God is at work, we can be confident that God is going to **produce** the very **best results**. But we need help discerning how to **follow God’s best**, don’t we? This is why we pray for wisdom or discernment. It’s not just so we would know the right things, but that we would do them.

The word “**discern**” in the Greek means “to **test**.” When you sit down and take a **test** or **quiz**, you try to figure out which is the right answer. Or when you’re driving someplace, and you decide not to use your **phone’s GPS**, you’re testing your knowledge of the way. Or when you see if you can run a **5K**, you’re testing your body to see if you have the endurance. Let’s pray for each other to pass the test God gives us. Paul wants the Philippians to test themselves and turn to Jesus. I want us to test ourselves to root out our own selfishness, pride, and disunity and turn to Jesus. *Pray for love and discernment and...*

3. Purity (v10)

And then Paul adds, “so that you may be... pure and and blameless for the day of Christ”(v10). The word for pure (eilikrinēs) here is a compound of the Greek words for sun (hēlios) and judge (krinō). Paul is saying, would you be judged in light of the shining sun and be “found clear and pure.”² According to Steven Lawson in *Philippians for You*:

[This word for pure] was originally used to describe a piece of fine pottery that was judged in the light of the sun and found to be without any cracks. In ancient times, devious merchants would conceal flaws in their expensive pottery with wax. The authenticity of valuable pottery was revealed when held up to the light of the sun.³

A day is coming when **Christ** will **return** and **judge** us, bringing to light every dark thing we’ve hidden in our hearts. He will expose our motives and our flaws and all our sins (1 Cor 4:5). So we **need to pray** for each other that on that day, we will each be found to be **without cracks**, without flaws, pure and smooth. In other words, you need to pray, “Father, would Jonathan be less damaged! Would I be less damaged! Would you work out the cracks in our lives where sin seeps in?” But we can’t fix ourselves. We’re like the devious merchants who can wax over our cracks and pretend they’re not there, but that doesn’t fix them. Only God can do that. This brings us to our final prayer request.

4. Fruit (v11)

² MGD, s.v. “εἰλικρινής,” paragraph 4533. [accord://read/Mounce_Greek_Dictionary#4533](http://read/Mounce_Greek_Dictionary#4533)

³ Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith* (God's Word For You Book 18) (p. 39). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

Paul's final prayer request in v11 is that the Philippians would be "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God." The **fruit of righteousness** is a life that has been **changed by Jesus** and is **bearing fruit**. Every aspect of who you are, from the **identity issues**, how you treat your **family** and fellow **church** people, how you live when nobody is **watching**, everything is being **transformed by Jesus**.

We can only bear the **fruit of whole-life righteousness** if our lives have been first touched by the **fruit of Christ's righteousness**. **Christ's righteousness** is the **seed** planted in **my stony heart** that slowly pushes and breaks my rocky heart apart, bursting forth with a beautiful yellow **Son-flower**, a Christ-flower. And as we **reflect** more and more the qualities and attitudes of Jesus Christ, becoming more like him, what do we do? We accomplish the very last line of Paul's prayer. We bring **glory** and **praise** to **God**.

How should we pray? Gratefully, joyfully, confidently, affectionately. What should we pray for? Love, discernment, purity, fruit. Why we can pray all these things? Because God is at work!

Pray like God is at work.

The **Royal Palace** in London issued a statement that said when LeBron James threw his arm around Duchess Kate he didn't break **royal protocol**. The **senior communications officer** for **Buckingham Palace** said, "When members of the **Royal Family** meet people they want them to feel as comfortable as possible. There is **no such thing as royal protocol**." So it was okay for LeBron James to put his arm over Kate.

If praying gratefully, and joyfully, and confidently, and affectionately for more love, more discernment, more purity, and more fruit, sounds a bit **familiar with God the Father** to you, it's because it is! God is not just a King, he's our Father; and his Son, the King of kings, is our brother. You will be able to throw your arm around Christ, and he'll throw his arm around you; and then he'll show you all the things he, and his Father, and the Spirit have been doing in our lives and world. Imagine that day and **pray like God is at work**.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here](#) to listen to more [sermons](#) or [click here](#) to read [our story](#).