

Real Love

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

- [0 : 0 0] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, if you'd like to learn a little more about us, you can go to FCCgreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.
- But hey, we are just excited today to get into the Word of God, but most of all, let that Word get into us and change these hearts. Now, we are in a series called Rejoice right now. This is week number two.
- We're going to be in Philippians 1, 9 through 11, if you want to go ahead and start turning in your Bible. And the message today is called Real Love. Now, there was a song released back in 2010 by a guy named Jaron Lowenstein that is all about prayer over his ex-girlfriend.
- And I want to read you some of these lyrics. He says, I haven't been to church since I don't remember when. Things were going great till they fell apart again. So I listened to the preacher as he told me what to do.
- He said, you can't go hating others who have done wrong to you. Sometimes we get angry, but we must not condemn. Let the good Lord do his job. You just pray for them.
- [1 : 1 3] And then he says this in the chorus. He says, I pray your brakes go out running down a hill. I pray a flower pot falls from a windowsill and knocks you in the head like I'd like to.
- I pray your birthday comes and nobody calls. I pray you're flying high when your engine stalls. I pray all your dreams never come true. Just know wherever you are, honey, I pray for you.
- That is bad. Bad, bad, bad in church. I think we can do better than that as we look at a prayer today from the Apostle Paul to the church in Philippi that is all about what real love looks like.
- And spoiler alert, doesn't sound anything like that song. But as you're turning here in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 1, kind of towards the back of your Bible, let me welcome you to week number two of our series called Rejoice.
- And I got to tell you, this book over the last three months has taken on a significant meaning to me. If you remember back in May, I was on my month-long sabbatical.
- [2 : 1 8] And while my plan was to read through the entire Bible in that month, I know it's a lofty goal I had, on day two, so I did day one, day two, I felt like the Lord spoke to my heart and clearly said, What are you trying to prove?
- Who are you trying to impress? I just want you to read the book of Philippians this month. So I read through the four chapters of Philippians multiple times as God was trying to get a message across to my heart.
- See, the older I've got, I'm just going to be very honest with you here, the older I've gotten, the more assertive I've become. Probably the more type A I've become.

Now, I do try to be sensitive to other people around me and not come across too strong, even though I probably fail sometimes. But I am convinced that it's probably because of this lead pastor role that requires me to kind of get some things done, to keep everything moving and on track.

But one thing I've always struggled with is this pursuit of contentment or joy. Anyone else just want to be honest today that maybe you've struggled not having the joy and the contentment that you want in your life?

[3 : 32] And as a person who's very driven, always up early with my to-do list, I'm ready to rock and roll. You don't have to wake me up in the morning. It's so easy to walk in my own strength, to not rely on the Lord to lead.

It is easy to find myself lacking in joy when I know spirit-filled rejoicing is readily available to me as a child of God if I will just trust Him.

And why in the world would the Lord lead me to the book of Philippians? Because He knows me a thousand times better than I know myself. And He wants to see me walk in the joy of my salvation every single day.

And I have a feeling that He wants the same thing for you. Now, if you remember, last week we started this series off talking about the ingredients that need to go into the batch that are needed for joy.

We have to be thankful people. When those critical, slanderous, selfish thoughts try to invade our mind, we quickly replace them with thankfulness.

[4 : 39] Paul also says we must be in partnership with other believers, having that godly support system. You know, one of the most foolish things we can do in our faith is try to walk it alone.

You were wired by God for community. And we also have to be all in when it comes to growing in our faith every day. We call this discipleship.

Church isn't meant to be a check it off the box. I've done my religious duty for the week. I'm good to go. Uh-uh. If we are in Christ, we are the church.

And when we come to Jesus, it is a daily process of being transformed into His likeness. And then today, I want to look at this prayer from Paul to this church in Philippi that he and Silas had started.

And this church is a church that would have sought his guidance in leading God's precious flock. They would have looked up to Him. And don't forget, Paul is in Rome.

[5 : 40] He's under house arrest. Guard always chained to him. He's on trial. And if he's found guilty of defying Caesar by worshipping Jesus, then he can be put to death.

And even though his circumstances may seem grim, we don't see a depressed man sitting there crying and sulking. No, he's rejoicing in Christ.

Seeing this amazing opportunity before him to share the good news of Jesus with everyone he can, including some high-ranking Romans. He knows that God in him is greater than anything man can do to him.

So, let's start here. And let's just read all three of these verses that we're going to cover today. Philippians 1. And let's start here in verse 9.

It says, And this is my prayer, That your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

[6 : 56] Now, I love how in several of Paul's letters, he writes these sincere prayers over his brothers and sisters in Christ that he is rooting for in every way.

And in this prayer, his focus is real love. And the reason I said real is because we live in a world where there's a lot of counterfeit. And sadly, even in churches today, you can't always trust that love is going to be defined biblically.

That you'll get an accurate definition because his word is God breathed and it's absolute truth. And we can trust that. So many are ignoring what God teaches to run after their own comforts, their own preferences, maybe to seem more tolerant or even to just appease and not come across judgy.

And yet Paul isn't praying that they will have this mushy, gushy, little feel-good factory love where everyone's told, hey, you do what's good for you and I'll do what's good for me.

Not a chance because that's not real love that we see defined by the God of the universe. That's why Paul speaks truth where we love God first.

[8 : 12] And that leads us to love our neighbor in a way that calls them to live a life of surrender to Christ. Because that's where we discover joy. Not my way, but in his perfect ways.

So if you're a note taker, one thing you can always do is you can go to the YouVersion Bible app. Under the menu, under events, you can go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana.

And then you can see our outline. And this passage today just kind of naturally lays itself out for us in this way. Real love, here's the first thing, real love is always growing.

See, you and I will never reach that perfect agape love that Christ showed for us on the cross. But what is stopping us from trying, as we are called, to always be growing, maturing in our love for God and for others?

And as we look at the first part of verse 9 again, Paul simply says, And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more.

[9 : 18] And Tina Turner may ask, well, what's love got to do with it? And the answer is everything. Because just like we said last week, one major marker of being a Christ follower is being a person who overflows with joy.

Another one is having love for others. They go hand in hand. Jesus made this very clear on the day before he would go to the cross to show us that agape, that unconditional love.

And he's telling them that he must suffer to set us free. He also says this in John 13, 34 and 35. A new command I give you.

Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples. Say it with me. If you love one another.

This was so important to Jesus that it was one of the last things he wanted to make sure he reinforced to them. Because I've loved you and will show you that to its fullest extent on the cross and the empty tomb, Jesus says, now you are to love one another in the same way.

[10 : 27] Because that's what will change this world. In fact, an early church father named Tertullian, who lived from about, we don't know exactly, but about 150 to 220 AD.

So second into the third century, he lived in the Roman Empire. He was known for his Christian teachings, especially in Latin. And he said that as the church grew in and around Rome, the government grew suspicious of Christians.

And they were afraid their loyalty to Rome would turn into a revolt because of this belief system that they held. So what they did is they sent spies into some of the churches for their worship services to observe.

And these guys knew nothing about Christianity. And one of them came back. And it's really interesting. Here's what he wrote. And I'm going to paraphrase it. He said in their meetings, they talk all about this guy named Jesus.

And even though he's absent from the meeting, they're so excited because he's supposed to return soon. And then he said this, they sure do love him and one another.

[11 : 35] Man, that's awesome. And I hope that's true of us, that when people encounter us, and let's make this clear, as Romans 3.23 says, we are all flawed human beings who need the grace of Jesus Christ.

His forgiveness, his love and grace are the only things that forgive and change us, giving us the ability to love others in a life-changing way.

But my prayer over your life and mine is that we are different like that 2nd century Roman church or that 3rd century church. And where the world's love is selfish and often phony, our love will be genuine and Christ-like, showing others that Jesus is, in fact, the way, the truth, and the life.

And that we will be committed to what Paul says here in Philippians 1.9, devoted to growing and abounding more and more in love every day.

And then the second thing I want you to see, so real love is always growing, and then second, it's always knowing. And this is where I want to hunker down for just a little longer today, because there are so many unbiblical definitions of love.

[12 : 52] So real love is knowing and walking in God's definition, because that's all that matters in the end. And when we do things God's way, he will always bless it.

It's amazing to me how many churches fall to pieces because they decide to start doing things their way and not according to the word. And I like how Isaiah 55.8.9 from the New Living Translation, it contrasts the difference between God's wisdom and mine.

It says, And yet, if you're like me, sometimes I keep going my way, banging my head against the wall all along the way.

But when I finally come to my senses, kind of like the prodigal son laboring back to his father, I can see that my ways lead to chaos, to frustration, to bitterness, to anger, to revenge, to pain.

And yet, when I abide in a close relationship with Christ, walking in his ways, then God's word tells me in Galatians 5 that there's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

[14 : 21] So look with me at the kind of love that Paul wants for this church in Philippi. And we're going to look here at chapter 1 of Philippians verses 9 and 10.

He says, Have you ever had someone say to you, Do you want the good news first or the bad?

Or how about this? Ray, you can lose 30 pounds, have a six-pack, a toned body, energy to play with your kids nonstop, and just feel great about yourself. And I'm like, Yeah, sure.

Sign me up. Well, Ray, you're going to have to eat this, not eat that, drink only this, be disciplined to do this workout routine every single day. And I'm like, Never mind.

I think I'll just stay chunky, okay? And that's sort of what this passage is doing. As we get the good news in verse 10, Paul gives us kind of the picture.

[15 : 27] So I'm going to flip-flop and look at the good news first, and then look at what it takes to get there. But Paul gives us this picture of what we can do in Christ, that we'll be able to discern what is best.

And you know as well as I do, that there are a lot of situations we deal with in life that aren't so cut and dry. They're not so black and white, where we need the wisdom of Christ to know how to handle this situation.

And the Greek word for discern here is dakamezo. And that refers to a process of actually testing coins in that first century to determine the purity of the metal and the genuineness of the coin.

So Paul's saying, Hey, you're going to be able in the power of Christ to have a love in every situation of life that can be discerning, that can test and know what's best, what's godly, and what honors him.

And not only will you have godly discernment, but you'll also be pure and blameless until the day you meet Jesus. That word pure carries with it this idea, and I'm going to be quick explaining this, but this idea of being tested by sunlight.

[16 : 35] See, in the first century, a lot of statues, figurines, different things were made, and yet there were also fakes from lesser materials that would not hold up.

So when someone sold the good ones, that probably cost them a pretty penny, they would often say, Hey, these are without wax. Because the fakes are the broken ones that have been cobbled back together had a mixture of wax that did not hold up.

And when you put them up to the sunlight, the cracks and the imperfections showed. So Paul is saying that not only will we have godly discernment, but our faith in Christ can be pure and sincere.

Not fake when we're just at church, but my mouth, my attitude, my intentions, my purpose, they are the same on Tuesday night with my kids, Friday night with the friends, Sunday morning in worship with the body of Christ.

No matter where I go, although I am far from perfect, my heart belongs to you, Jesus. And because I am saved by the grace of God, because I have been covered by his blood, I will stand before him someday hearing those words, Well done, good and faithful servant.

[17 : 50] Enter into your rest. See, that's the end result. That's the good news. Now let's look at the kind of love Paul is praying for this church in Philippi, and ultimately for all of us who confess Christ as Lord.

Here's what he says in verse 9. And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more. So we've covered that part. But listen to this. May abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

And while this isn't bad news at all, it's the tough part that requires us to be focused on daily growth in Christ. The best way I've heard this explained was by Skip Heidzik, a pastor and great Bible teacher.

He explained godly love like a river. He said a river is good until it leaves its banks. Then it can cause crazy devastation and destruction.

Just think about the Texas flood that destroyed that church camp and so sadly took so many lives. Or even hurricanes that flood cities and cause so much suffering.

[18 : 54] And the same is true when our love is just this do whatever you want emotionalism, this worldly definition that's not true love at all. Even Jesus wasn't afraid to love the religious leaders enough to call out their hypocrisy and call them whitewashed and full of dead man's bones, right?

He wasn't afraid to turn over the tables and drive those getting rich off the church from the temple. And he also wasn't afraid to be tender and call a hated tax collector out of a tree to bring salvation to his home.

Or even in Matthew 8, to touch the untouchable leper and bring healing to this man's body. To call us to holiness. See, Jesus shows us time and time again that his love is both compassionate and full of truth.

It's both full of empathy and discipline. Now, did you see verse 9? Did you hear what that said? That your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

That depth of insight is also translated discernment. So think about those two things. Knowledge and discernment. They are the banks of the river that keep it contained where it needs to be.

[20 : 11] That keep it from getting out of control. And Paul is saying that true love is guided first by God's word. Knowledge of the word of God that produces a life of holiness according to God's perfect standards.

So when we love those around us, our love cannot be defined by how the world spells out love. Instead, our love is the biblical definition where God's word is always our guide.

I want to share a sensitive story with you that happened a couple years ago. And I do this knowing how tender this topic is and that we may even have some who don't agree with the biblical view we take.

But I had a guy message the church asking our view on homosexuality as he was considering coming to visit our church on a Sunday. And instead of trying to have that conversation through some kind of message, which is impossible, I just asked, Hey, will you just come and meet with me and let's just talk it through?

I was pretty sure that we would see it differently because I had a feeling why he was asking. So we sat down and can I tell you, he was a fantastic guy.

[21 : 20] Had been a part of churches most of his adult life. And because this was a struggle for him, he thought, well, it must be okay. Well, we talked for probably an hour. We read several Bible passages that show God's blueprint for marriage, for sex, for relationships.

I treated him with the utmost dignity and he did the same for me. We actually got along just great and had great conversation. And even though I don't know that I changed his mind, we shook hands.

Everything was fine. And when I've seen him in public, you know, I greet him and everything is good. And as I prayed before that meeting, I felt like the most loving thing I could do is share the truth with him that could set him free.

Because I am just a mist here today and gone tomorrow. I don't get to decide truth. You don't get to decide truth. I'm too flawed for that job description, okay? But we have a God who is eternal and who is perfect in his righteous standards.

Who lays out his word before us, showing us the truth that we are to walk in. And the most loving thing we can do is speak truth with a heart of grace and love, letting God take it from there.

[22 : 32] So love is always growing. It's always knowing as we love according to the truth of the word. And last, real love is always showing. Now, let's read this whole passage again and then we'll focus on verse 11.

Philippians 1, let's start in verse 9. And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. Here's the goal. That's the goal.

Here's verse 11. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. That phrase, fruit of righteousness, is an Old Testament idea where Proverbs 11.30 speaks of it as a tree of life.

And it's this simple idea that you are not saved by your good works. But when you are saved, good works will flow out of that salvation.

Your life will be changed and therefore that tree of life will produce fruit that is good to the glory of God. Fruit that is evident because you are a child of God walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[23 : 45] You're a brand new creation in Christ and that old life is gone. That ugliness, that old life that produces ugliness in us is no longer who you are as the Lord wants to use you in big ways.

See Ephesians 2 verse 10 actually puts it like this. For we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So to summarize what Paul is saying, he says, I pray your love will continue to grow greater every day. I pray that it will be defined not by the world but by God's standards and true agape love.

And then hear that your life will produce fruit that impacts the world around you. Because you have a purpose in Christ and he wants to do incredible things in you so that lives can be impacted for the kingdom.

I had a friend of mine send me a video just this last week about a story that I'd heard. But really, the version he sent had some new details I'd never heard.

[24 : 55] In 1934, an American tent revival preacher was holding a meeting in Charlotte. And there just so happened to be two 14-year-old boys who heard the commotion and came over to check it out.

Well, as they looked in the tent, the seats were full. And so they start to walk away. And that's when an usher looks over and sees this happening. No one knows this guy's name to this day.

He runs after them and he brings them back, pushing people over, finding two seats. That night, those two teenagers gave their life to Jesus, consecrating themselves to live out God's purposes for their lives.

One was Billy Graham, who would go on to preach to more people than anyone who's ever lived, leading tens of millions of people to Jesus Christ. The other was a man named Grady Wilson, who worked with Billy Graham, took on the massive task of organizing those large evangelistic crusades.

And while we should honor faithful people like Mordecai Hamm, who was the evangelist that preached to Billy Graham, we should honor Billy Graham, we should honor Grady White. But here I love the fact that none of that could have happened if it wasn't for an unknown usher who loved Jesus enough to chase those two boys down so they could hear the gospel message.

[26 : 21] See, there's quite a difference between the love expressed in that song that we started off with today and the love that that usher showed those two boys.

And my prayer over this church family, over everyone listening to my voice, is that our love, grounded in the Word of God, will abound and it will impact whoever God puts in our path.

Amen? Amen. All right, pray with me. Heavenly Father, we are so grateful for the Word of God that you have spoken over us today.

And Father, I just pray that you will take this Word, that you will use it to store our hearts, and that we will be people who love this world the way you call us to. Not with just an emotional love, not just with a, hey, anything goes, but a true biblical love that cares about people's eternity and that truly wants to meet them where they are and see Christ bring transformation.

So, Father, use us. Take our hearts, use our lives, and make us more like Jesus, we pray. And we pray all of this in the name that is above every other name, the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

[27 : 39] And God's people said, amen and amen. Amen. Hey, let me share just a quick invitation. If you've been listening to this, and maybe you have questions about your faith, maybe you have questions about the church, maybe you have questions about, hey, I want to give my life to Jesus.

I just don't know how to do that. We would love here at First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor. We'd love to come alongside you and help you just like others have done for us on our faith journey.

So here's how you can reach out to us. You can call the church office at 812-663-8488, or you can email me at rayattfccgreensburg.com.

Hey, we are so grateful that you tuned in today. God bless you, and I hope you have a fantastic week.