

Praying for One Another- Part 3

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Date: 23 November 2025

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading for today is taken from Philippians chapter 1 verses 1 to 11.! Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are Philippi and with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you. Always in every prayer of mine, you are all making my prayer with joy because of the partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 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. It is right for me to feel this way about you and 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.

For God is my witness. How I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so 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.

This is the end of the reading. Good morning. For the past two weeks, we've enjoyed some wonderfully crafted messages about praying for one another.

[1 : 53] And now this is the last installment of that sermon series. Pastor Moss has done a wonderful job up until now with how he has delivered on this topic.

Now we come to this week and you stuck with me. So I almost feel like apologizing before we begin. But I really appreciate Lyndon, you're lifting me up in prayer before we began.

And many people have told me that they have prayed for this message. And so let's begin in that way. Let's begin by looking to the Lord. Father, you know our frailties.

You know our limitations. Lord, you have designed us so that we ought to lean on you, that we ought to call out to you, that we ought to depend on your spirit.

So you pray now that your spirit will be the one that delivers. Your spirit will be the one that teaches and opens understanding. And you pray, Lord, that this time together will be profitable.

[3 : 05] But all under the sound of my voice will not hear from me, but will hear from you. May you bless their hearts. I pray this in the name of Christ Jesus.

Amen. We're talking about praying for one another. And I want to share a story about my son, Andre. And he wouldn't mind me sharing this.

And even if he did, it would probably be a while before he saw this message. So I'm going to share it anyway. But when Andre was a very small boy, maybe three or four years old, I used to love to hear him pray.

Because his prayers were heartwarming. At the same time, they were very, very entertaining. They were heartwarming because it really showed that Andre loved people.

He cared for people. Andre prayed for everybody he knew. And I mean everybody. It took a long time for him to say a prayer. But it was also entertaining because Andre prayed for people who didn't really exist.

[4 : 22] So two of his favorite people to pray for were Batman and Superman. And he would pray that God would keep them safe from the bad people.

Well, Andre's prayer was not perfect. Even though Andre made mistakes, though, about who he prayed because they didn't exist.

His prayers are a good illustration of how Paul's prayer for the Philippians can be read. You see, from Andre's comic books, he had an idea of who Batman and Superman were.

And because they were protecting ordinary boys and girls like him, Andre grew to love those superheroes. And he grew to love the children who loved Batman and Superman.

So let's, this morning, look at Philippians, this passage. And let's see how we might be able to draw some parallel between Andre's imperfect prayer and how Paul prays for the Philippians and how we can pray for each other.

[5 : 50] So Paul's love for the brothers and sisters at Philippians is obvious in the letter to the Philippians. It's a deep affection for them.

And he professes this several times, even in the first few verses of the book. In verse 3, for example, he admits that he thanks God for them every time they come to mind.

And in fact, he tells them that he prays for them whenever he lifts up a prayer. And he didn't do it as if it were an obligation.

He did it with joy. His love for them kept him constantly bringing them before the Lord in prayer. So we see how Paul loved the believers at Philippi.

But despite his great love for them, despite his affection, we see him making a very interesting prayer for them.

[7 : 01] We see in verse 9, he prays that love would abound more and more.

This is clearly a church in which love abounded. They had love for Paul and they had love for each other. But Paul prays that their love would abound even more.

And this suggests that even though we are capable of love, we don't love perfectly. And because we don't love perfectly, there's always room in our relationships for more love.

Our love for each other can always deepen. Our love for each other can always be expressed and shown in more ways than in better ways.

But Paul doesn't stop there. He specifically prays about how he hopes their love will grow.

[8 : 10] And he lists two ways. They are with knowledge and secondly, with all discernment. So I want to look at actually three points this morning surrounding this prayer.

I want to look at firstly, love abounds with knowledge. Then love abounds with discernment. And finally, I want to look at the results of abounding love.

But first, love abounds with knowledge. Now, Paul doesn't expect the Philippians to just blindly love each other.

That would be unreasonable. Paul was not encouraging some kind of sentimental feeling that people could label love.

And in our culture, we tend to think of love in that way. We tend to think of love as a feeling. But I believe that our text this morning will not support that belief.

[9 : 20] Here, just as Peter says later in 1 Peter 3, when he says believers should always be ready to give an answer for their faith.

Paul gives the Philippians a godly reason for abounding love. Because in fact, love among the brotherhood, it flows from our faith.

And by extension, Paul gives the same reason to us. Paul expects their love to grow as they grow in knowledge of God and the knowledge of each other.

What they need to know, first of all, is who God is. So Paul wanted them to have a clear view of God, who he has revealed himself to be.

And they could know, they could know that through what we heard preached last week. So I'm referring to what Paul prayed for the Colossians.

[10 : 31] They could know God through his will. Now we heard last week that there are two different expressions of God's will.

There's his hidden or secret will. And then there is his revealed or open will. And it was explained to us that God's hidden will is what he decreed to come to pass.

It is his overarching plan for the world. And it ultimately displays God's complete control of all that happens.

What God decrees in his hidden will will always come to pass without fail. And we are told in Scripture that God has willed to save a chosen people for himself.

And we see this in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 4 and 5. And it says, So we see that there was nothing in this world that influenced God to do this.

[12 : 01] In fact, he willed our salvation before the world even existed. So there's no outside influence on him.

He does this purely out of his love. He has love for us. The genesis of this love is God himself, nothing else.

So we can know that this saving God is a loving God. And to say that God is a saving God, is a loving God, is a huge understatement.

We know that God is an exceedingly loving God. We know that because he did not withhold Christ from us.

He allowed Christ to be a sacrifice for us. We know that it was God's will for Christ to die as a substitute for his chosen people.

[13:09] And we see that in Matthew 26, verse 39, where we see Jesus at Gethsemane. And it reads, And going a little further, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And here we see the exceeding love of God. His love is so great for us that he would send the treasure of Jesus Christ to the cross in our place.

And just knowing that, just thinking about that should soften our hearts toward God. It should increase our affection for him. And flowing from that affection from God should be increased affection for our brothers and our sisters in the Lord.

Because we should realize that none of us deserve the salvation that God has given. He's given it to us by his grace.

And he's given it to us only by his grace. There's no merit that we have in it. And Paul points this out also in his letter to the Philippians in the passage that we're reading.

[14:38] In verse 7, he says, For you are all partakers with me of grace. So he's saying to them that they are part of a precious brotherhood.

That God's grace has reached all of us. And as God has been gracious to us, we should in turn be gracious to each other.

That should cause love to abound among us. And we can see that the Philippians embraced this. They were following this.

We see genuine acts of love flowing from them. Flowing from the grace of God. So they did not just have the sentiment toward Paul or sentiment toward each other.

But they became partners in the gospel with Paul. They ministered to him while he was in prison. They ministered to him.

[15:41] In fact, he was in prison when he wrote this letter. And we see that this love is not only sentimental, but there are actions that are built upon it.

These are actions that build up each other. And Paul prays that this would abound more and more. Another thing we can know about God's will is that once God saves us, it is his will that our salvation is preserved.

And Paul points to this also in the passage in Philippians 1 verse 6. Paul assures the Philippians that God's will for them to be saved.

And God's will for them is also for them to be preserved. So he says, and I am sure of this, that he who begun a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[16:52] And that is the day of Jesus Christ is when Christ returns for his church. That is when our sanctification will become complete. And there's not one moment up to that point where God is not with us.

He's with his chosen ones right up to that point and even into eternity. So Paul explicitly states that God will not abandon his chosen ones.

He would not allow them to fall away. He would not allow them to be lost. And the Philippians love for God would abound as they come to reflect on this more and more.

In the same way we can rejoice in coming to know this because this applies to us as well. We can know this more and more. And love can abound among us more and more.

So this aspect of God's will should cause us to see that our God is a faithful God.

[18:06] He's not fickle. He doesn't love us in one moment. And then he drops his love for us in another moment. His abounding love is constant toward us.

And this should be something that comforts us. And I'm sure that Paul intended for this to comfort the Philippians as well. And then we have many things in God's revealed will that we could consider to understand who God is.

God's revealed will tells us what pleases him. It tells us how we are to live. It tells us how he directs us to conduct ourselves.

And we can look, for example, at the Ten Commandments as part of God's revealed will. And we will see that God is also revealing himself in those commandments.

So we see in the first four commandments that God places himself as a supreme focus in our lives. In other words, our first duty is to God.

[19 : 26] He calls us to worship him and worship him only. And he calls us to honor him, not as we want to honor him, but as he requires.

So God is holy. And in the remaining commandments, we see that God calls us to have godly interactions with everyone we come in contact with, with others around us, our neighbors.

But we shouldn't think of these commandments. And we shouldn't think of any expression of God's will. It's just a list of do's and don'ts.

It's not a dispassionate thing that we just memorize and be kind of obligated to follow along with them.

The truth is, there is a clear motivation behind God's will. And the motivation is not that we would have mere knowledge of God.

[20 : 33] But it's about building a relationship. It's relational knowledge. God desires us to know him in an intimate way.

And in a relational way. And Jesus himself says this. He points out that God's commandments are not a checklist. And ultimately, they are about the relationship we are to have with God.

And they are about the relationship we are to have with each other. So we can see this when the Pharisee questioned Jesus about the great commandment.

And this is what he said in Matthew 22. And he said to them, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

[21 : 42] So we are clearly called into relationship with God. And we are also called into relationship with each other. And we see this even more clearly when we read Jesus' commands to the disciples.

On the night that he was betrayed, this is what he said. A new commandment I give you. That you love one another. Just as I have loved you.

You also are to love one another. By this, all people will know you are my disciples. If you love one another.

We are called to love one another. As Christ loved us. And we know that Christ loved us by serving us.

He served us with his entire life. And even his death. And we have to ask ourselves, are we able to do that? Are we able to serve each other with our entire life?

[22 : 47] Possibly even giving up our life. So we have established that the will of God shows that he is exceedingly loving.

He has steadfast love. And that steadfast love quickens our own love. So now let's consider discernment for abounding love.

Paul prays that the Philippians love would abound not only through knowledge, but also through discernment. And discernment is the ability to judge properly between one thing or another.

It's our ability to clearly make decisions. So knowledge is somewhat related to discernment, but it's not just about knowledge.

There's more to it. And we have shown in 1 Corinthians 12 that discernment is really a spiritual gift. So ultimately God is the one who provides this to us.

[23 : 58] God provides discernment. God provides discernment. And it seems as though the Apostle Paul desires for all the church to have some measure of this gift of discernment.

He seems to be saying that more insight is what we need. We need to get more insight into God and more insight into the lives of our brothers and sisters.

And the better we are able to do that, the more insight we get, the better we are able to see people's motives and their challenges and discern their heart.

And this is done by God's grace. And I was thinking about examples of this. And I think perhaps people who are married, you know, husbands and wives can really easily see this in their relationships.

And I thought, using myself as an example, I have a wife who most mornings makes breakfast for us. And many, many evenings throughout the week, she would cook dinner.

[25 : 11] And this is all despite her having a full-time job of her own, putting in many, many hours. And her job is very demanding. And as she does all this and more, I can observe how she does it.

I can observe what's her mood or her attitude as she does it. Is it, you know, doing it while she grumbles or is it doing it with a smile on her face?

And for me, happily, I can say that she normally does it with a smile on her face. So by her actions and the attitudes that accompany it, I can discern certain things.

I can make certain judgments. The fact that when I'm sick, she doesn't just leave me alone for me to heal myself. But I have her care and attention.

All this means that I can make certain judgments of her heart toward me. And I can discern, usually when everything is fine, I can discern when something might be wrong.

[26 : 25] And it's the same type of relationship within the local church in many ways. God gives us these deeper insights. We see people's struggles and we see their fears.

We see their challenges. We see their joys. And then the Holy Spirit uses all these things. He enlightens us. And we come to discover the heart of those within our community.

And through that, God builds affections. He builds relationships. At the same time that discernment is building love within our community, it also guides us in how to love.

And again, as an example, parents may be aware of this. There may be many, many things that our children want, they may ask for. But not everything is good for them. And we are always tempted to try to say yes to everything that they ask for because we feel like that's an expression of our love.

We want to show that we love our children. We want them to have the things that they desire. But not everything, as I said before, is actually good for them.

[27 : 50] Often, we have to say no to them. When we are wise, when we are discerning, we often withhold things that are not good from our children.

And that is actually a greater expression of love. And also, sometimes in community, there needs to be discipline. And again, we have a temptation to just let things slide when discipline is needed.

We don't want to hurt our brothers and sisters. We don't want to embarrass them. But biblical discipline is exactly for that purpose. It is to express our love for our brother and sister.

And it's for their good, not for their harm. It is to restore them in a spirit of gentleness. And we are told this in Galatians 6.

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

[29 : 07] Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Paul says that we are to bear one another's burdens by correcting each other.

And when we bear each other's burdens, we are fulfilling the law of Christ. And the law of Christ, as we read earlier, is just loving one another.

So again, we are driven back to the brotherhood. We are driven back to this love among the saints. And we need discerning spirits in all these various circumstances.

We need God's help for this. It is his spirit that helps us discern how to love in various circumstances.

So just as Paul prayed, we can pray for one another to grow in discernment. And finally, let's look at the results of abounding love.

[30 : 28] We find these in verses 10 and 11 of the passage today. We see Paul saying that when love abounds, we are able to approve what is excellent.

And the use of the word excellent is interesting. He could have said, you know, we would know what is good. But he goes beyond good.

I used to have a pastor who used to say that excellent is good to the superlative degree. And that was a big word. But I think it just means that, you know, excellent is super good.

So we are able to approve the highest degree of love, the highest degree of good, pardon me, when we have abounding love.

And theologian, there's a theologian by the name of Joe Rigney, and he again points to the will of God to illustrate this. And he specifically points to the Ten Commandments.

[31 : 36] He says that the Ten Commandments should be looked at as a loving father's instructions to his son. And here's what Joe Rigney says about this loving father's instruction to his

firstborn son.

These commandments show that God's character, what God's character is like, what he cares about and values, how he loves and what he prioritizes.

And they do so in order that God's son, his people, will come to resemble and reflect him, to share his priorities and values, to join him in his loves and hates.

So being able to approve what is excellent is being able to have the mind of God. It is us being transformed to think like God thinks.

So when we love what he loves and when we hate what he hates, we are approving what is excellent. Paul says, when we abound in love, we are pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

[32 : 56] And we are filled with the fruit of righteousness. Now these two statements are closely related. And the fact is that in a legal sense, we are already pure and blameless.

Because God declares that for every believer. He declares that we are blameless because we have the imputed righteousness of Christ.

It's not our own earned righteousness. It's Christ's righteousness that's given to us. He looks at us, not as we deserve to be looked at.

But he looks at us and he sees what Christ has achieved for us. So we are blameless. We are legally righteous.

But of course, in a practical sense, we still sin. We still fall. So what Paul is doing here is he is pointing to an outworking of our righteousness.

[33 : 59] He is actually pointing to the process of sanctification that we walk through until the return of Christ. And that is when we will be truly perfected.

So until that time, as long as we live, we are to be filled with the fruit of righteousness.

So in other words, there should be evidence in our actions and our deeds that we do belong to God.

Now, it's not the behavior and the deeds that are the reason that we belong to God.

We're not saved by them. But they are the results of our salvation. They are proof that we are being sanctified by the Lord.

And Paul makes sure to point out that all this comes by the power of Christ Jesus. He's the one who has made our good works possible.

[35 : 04] And he's the root of them. Because it is in him that we have our righteousness, our righteous status before God.

So all of our good works in Christ, they actually praise God. All of them give him glory because the work ultimately points to him and not to our own goodness.

And the team is going to come back now. But as we conclude this series on praying for one another, I think it's an encouraging point for us to once again point to Jesus Christ.

We said earlier today, and I'll say it again, I'll say that the truth is we don't love perfectly. We don't live perfectly.

And we don't pray for another perfectly. In fact, you know, our prayers might in many ways to God seem like Andrea's infantile prayer.

[36 : 19] But we should still pray for one another. Because our prayers don't need to be perfect. Scripture tells us that Christ even now is advocating for us.

Romans 8.34 tells us who was condemned. Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised?

Who's at the right hand of God? Who indeed is interceding for us? So as we pray for one another, we pray imperfectly. But God still honors our prayer.

It doesn't matter how feeble they may be. He honors them. Meanwhile, he hears the perfect plea of Christ on our behalf.

His blood has spoken for us and he continues to speak for us before God. So let's be encouraged as we pray for one another.

[37 : 26] That our Savior continues to be our advocate. Let's grow together. Let's grow together in love. As we pray for each other.

Let love abound among us. Let's pray for each other.