
Praying in our Relationships

Philippians 1:1-11

The Fellowship of the Ring – a band of the most unlikely working together in a great quest for a grand cause. Through terrible hardship, the great love of Sam for Frodo sustains their relationship and partnership. Till the end, he will not turn back. He will not betray Frodo in spite of the sneering, slobbering Gollum. He reminds him of the great task. He warns him of the dire results of failure. He keeps enemies at bay. Samwise is just a hobbit. He is just a friend. But mighty in his love and finally joyous in the coming home, friends forever.

This great story reflects some of the central themes of the book of Philippians – a great task, a long journey, terrible and wicked enemies, frail and false friends, grand companions and great loves. It is a call to rejoice in all with all. It is a call to sacrificial Christian relationships.

In your relationships, what are some of the greatest:

Challenges?

Struggles?

Joys?

How do people influence your attitude on any given day?

How do they affect or shape your praying?

Let's think then together from our Bibles over our relationships and prayer.

Roots – the Fellowship for Prayer

(v. 1-2)

Our letter opens as letters written in that day did. Being written on a scroll, it was important that letters begin with who it was from and who it was to.

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.

From the Partners

The letter is from the partners in the gospel, Paul and Timothy. Paul is the apostle. Timothy is the disciple, the protégé. When the church was founded, Paul and Timothy, as well as Silas and Luke, were traveling as a missionary team. They were partners serving in the gospel. They were servants of Christ Jesus. Thus, they were serving together and serving under the Lord.

To the People

Who are these Philippian saints? This is the church whose beginnings were recorded in Acts 16. Timothy had just joined Paul and Silas having been commended by two churches. Luke joins the team at Troas as they set sail and journey, stopping at two islands and landing at Philippi. Their witness leads to the conversion of Lydia, a seller of purple dyes and fabrics. They cast out a demon from a servant girl who was telling fortunes. This gets them arrested, beaten and thrown into jail. Their jailer and his whole family are converted after an earthquake sent by God to deliver them from the jail. These converts form the nucleus of the church in Philippi. These are some of the saints along with the overseers and deacons.

Why is this important? Because Paul and the people of this church had a deep and loving relationship. He makes a great point to write to all the saints, and including the leaders. He speaks of them in a way that sees them as together.

So, the common form of greeting in the letter does more than it seems. It is already highlighting relationships. Paul and Timothy are serving together. People and leaders are recipients together. As the letter unfolds, what is hinted at here will come into full light.

Relationship – a Foundation of Prayer

(v. 3-8)

The second common element in letter writing of that day was a “wish prayer of blessing.” It was “I hope that all is well with you and that you are blessed.” Paul turned this simple part of a letter into a prayer that introduces his theme. All through this paragraph, Paul speaks warmly of their relationship and how it grounds his prayer.

In our Thoughts

(v.3-6)

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.

Do you see the repeated reference to thoughts, mind, remembrance? When he thinks of them, he is thankful, joyful and prayerful. He thanks God for them. He prays regularly for them. The faces of Lydia, the Roman jailor and his family fill his memories and his prayers.

Why? Is it just because Paul is a people-person? Is it because they have just remained close friends over all this time? No, it is because of what he calls, their “partnership in the gospel”. It is good to have Christian friends. But it is even greater to have Christian friends who are partners, who are connected in the gospel. Through this Paul is introducing his theme. He is also alluding to his concern. If I can put it this way, Philippians is about “joy in the partnership.” It is about rejoicing in the midst of relationships.

Verse 6 then needs to be understood in this context. This verse is often yanked out of its context and made to say something different. Paul is confident that the good work that God began will be finished. What is this “good work”? Is it salvation, as is commonly taught? Is it holiness, righteousness, sanctification? No, it is the partnership in the gospel. This is the work that God will complete. Paul is utterly confident that God will bring their partnership to fulfillment, to completion. What God has begun in gospel partners He will finish at the final day. The work of the gospel will be completed – the church in its city, Paul in his imprisonment and them together.

Why does he say this? Because their relationship and partnership were being threatened. It is God who sends and prospers the gospel. It is God who sustains relationships. It is God who will maintain the partnership. It is God who will accomplish His purposes in bringing people together. This team of missionaries and those saints with its leaders will experience the full and finished work of God. But not without some trouble first.

In our Affections

(v.7-8)

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.

Paul asserts that it is right for him to have a genuine affection and confident expectation of them. Because God will complete the work begun in them all, he feels affection for them because they were joint partakers in the grace of God.

Here are various forms of the same word. They are partners in the gospel and partakers in grace. Their relationship is larger and greater than themselves. It is a fellowship together in the great work of God – the gospel and grace.

This relationship had very practical effects. They became partners and sharers in Paul's grace, the grace he received while he was imprisoned and when he was defending the gospel. Do you see this? Over all the distance from Rome where Paul was imprisoned to Philippi, the grace of God was flowing through their relationship.

He asserts and affirms, with God as witness, how much he longs for them. This longing is full of emotion, affection and tenderness. But it is not just emotion and affection that is natural. It is not just normal feeling for people. It is the very affection of Christ. The affection of Christ was flowing through Paul to them; and presumably, through them to Paul.

What do your relationships look like? Is your thinking and loving of others merely of the same kind as the world? Do your Christian relationships have a richer, fuller, heavenly quality? Do you think about people and have a warm affection for people, those whom God has placed in your life? Do you see yourself as being in partnership with them?

Or do you feel distant from your brothers and sisters? Do you have little affection for others here in church? Whose fault is that? It is yours! You have to cultivate and pursue people – to talk to them, to seek to share with them, to encourage them to share with you. Affections either rise and fail based on how you think about them. That is evident from this text. Paul affirmed a series of Biblical and personal truths about these people. From this, he cultivated an affection for them.

Requests – a Function of Prayer

(v. 9-10)

God has invited us to come to Him with our requests. We see this function of prayer modeled here for us by Paul.

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.

Its Content

Paul is praying for something to happen in stereo. He prays that their love may grow – no, not just grow, but abound more and more. He desires more than a spring, more than a high fountain – he prays for a waterfall, a roaring cataract of love. But even great love must be joined with knowledge and discernment. So he is not praying for blind love. He wants a growing love that is eyes wide open. It sees clearly and makes insightful and wise decisions. It understands what is going on and distinguishes between what is right and wrong.

Why must love grow? Love must grow because it is always less than it can be. God's love is the only love full and complete and cannot grow. But our love in our relationships must always grow. Otherwise, it may begin to lessen. When conflicts and difficulties arise, we must keep love strong and growing so that it

does not wane. Our love for one another will grow as we think about others as we ought and sacrifice for others as we can. This is a theme through the rest of the book – how does love grow?

Why must a growing love be fused with growing knowledge and discernment? Because the tendency is set loving people over against knowledge and discernment. We tend to think that person with great knowledge is usually not a “people-person”. And anyone can love well even if they are not growing in wisdom, the fusion of knowledge and discernment. The Bible does not think this way. The person who refuses to grow in love will become crippled in their ability to really love. If I do not take the time and effort to know Esther (my wife) well, then my genuine love for her is not really growing.

Within ministry, gospel relationships, this is vital. Too often under the banner of love, real understanding of one another is buried. Biblical love seeks to know and understand the people we are serving with. It develops a keen sense of insight into how that person thinks and wants. It stops making assumptions about other people motivations. It will seek to promote the other person’s welfare. Is this what your ministry relationships look like?

Within marriages and casual friendships, this is vital. Marriage is a partnership between a Christian brother and sister. It has the gospel at its core – to demonstrate the relationship between Christ and the church. Therefore love in a marriage, the relationship of a Christian marriage must grow in both knowing one another with insight and wise decisions, but it also must grow in loving and knowing God. Is this what your marriage relationship looks like?

Its Cause

Love and discernment must grow together so that what is excellent may be approved. What we need in our relationships is love that is discriminating. Why do I say that? For example, in dating, growing Biblical love will be accompanied with a knowledge of God that causes us to choose what we do together wisely. This will be true in marriage. And it is true in Christian relationships and ministry partnerships. Love for a Christian is not sentimentality. It is not just a warm feeling for others although it must have “affection” in it. The love of Christian relationships is interwoven with knowing God and each other well in such a way that we discern and choose what is right.

Its Consequence

The consequence of a growing love, fused with knowledge and discernment that approves what is best, is that we will be pure and blameless. The end result is a deep, holistic, life-wide holiness. We will become who we already are. The saints will be perfected. We will be blameless before Christ. All of us. None will fall short. Because at the day of Christ, it is not what we did, but what Christ did that will make us into what He has designed us to become.

But we must grow in this. Here is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life. You have already arrived so keep traveling.

Results - the Focus of Prayer**(v. 10-11)**

This last verse then anticipates the results of his petitions. This is the long term focus of his prayer.

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.

Fruit in Godly Character

The growing love, knowledge and discernment in Christian relationships is part of the fruit of righteousness. When Christ produces His righteousness in us it yields these things. They themselves are the fruit. Do you see it? When you cultivate godly, wise love you are growing this harvest. It is in the soil of your relationships. It is from the seed of the gospel. It is watered and fertilized and grown by grace.

Glory to God

This brings glory and praise to God. It does not cause us to point to ourselves. It does not congratulate self. It is not grown by mere human effort. From the gospel by God's grace fruit producing righteousness is waved before God. It shows that He is worth it. It shows that He is worthy. It praises God alone.

May God grant that your life will be all covered with that harvest of righteousness that Jesus Christ produces to the glory and praise of God. (Moffat)

Reflect and Respond

What do you do to cultivate relationships?

What does it mean to think about and care about others?

When you pray for others, what do you ask for?

What brings you joy, gladness, happiness in your relationships?

Do you have relationships grounded in the gospel and grown by grace?