

**THANKING GOD FOR THE PAST; TRUSTING GOD FOR THE FUTURE**  
**PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11**

*Sometimes it is hard to give thanks for the circumstances and people of our past.* That's not just true in the past three months, but it's also true of life in general — illness, unexpected deaths, financial hardship (poverty), broken (destroyed) relationships, abuse of too many kinds, and disappointed dreams all combine to make us reticent to give thanks for the past. It just hurts too much.

*Sometimes it is scary to look to the future* (the past few weeks have likely made some of us cautious about thinking too much about what the future might be). Do you see a safer, more carefree, hopeful future for your children or grandchildren? Neither do I (at least not on this earth).

How will we respond to past hardships and anticipated future hardships? How will we deal with the past that we might rather not have had and a future we are dreading? We will give thanks for the past. We will ask God and trust for the future. What's the relationship between gratitude and trust? Piper tells us —

...when gratitude for God's past grace is strong, the message is sent that God is supremely trustworthy in the future because of what he has done in the past. In this way faith is strengthened by a lively gratitude for God's past trustworthiness...Gratitude for bygone grace is constantly saying to faith, "Be strong, and do not doubt that God will be as gracious in the future as I know he's been in the past." [John Piper, *Future Grace*.]

We don't know what the future will bring, but we know that the One who has been sovereign over the past will always be sovereign in the future. He was trustworthy yesterday; He will be trustworthy tomorrow. To help us develop that theme, let's turn to a familiar passage — **Philippians 1:3-11**. Here we will find —

**FOR PAST GRACE, THANK GOD; FOR FUTURE GRACE, ASK GOD.**

This morning we want to give thanks, and we want to demonstrate trust. We will do that by looking at Paul's pattern for prayer as well as his specific prayer for the Philippians and then encouraging ourselves in our own circumstances.

**1. Thanking God for the Past (vv. 3-8)**

- ✓ Thank God for the **PEOPLE** of the Past (v. 3)
- ✓ Thank God with **INTENTIONAL, JOYFUL** Prayer (v. 4)
- ✓ Thank God for the **GOSPEL** (v. 5)
- ✓ Thank God for Completed **SANCTIFICATION** (v. 6)
- ✓ Thank God for **FELLOWSHIP** (v. 7)
- ✓ Thank God for Holy **LONGINGS** (v. 8)

**2. Trusting God for the Future (vv. 9-11)**

- ✓ Trust God for **ABOUNDING** Love (v. 9a)
- ✓ Trust God for **DISCERNING** Love (v. 9b)
- ✓ Trust God for **VITAL** Love (v. 10a)
- ✓ Trust God for **ENDURING** Love (v. 10b)
- ✓ Trust God for **FRUITFUL** Love (v. 11a)
- ✓ Trust God for **GOD-GLORIFYING** Love (v. 11b)

## 1. Thanking God for the Past (vv. 3-8)

- I am using this passage to guide us into gratitude for the past three months particularly. But we can (and should) also use these verses to be stimulated to gratitude in other areas of our lives as well.
- The verb **I thank** is the main verb in vv. 3-6 and then Paul builds further on it in vv. 7-8 before beginning his prayer for the Philippians (vv. 9-11).
  - ✓ The verb is a present tense, which means Paul is repeatedly/habitually giving thanks for the Philippians. They are never far from his mind.
  - ✓ That Paul is consumed with thinking about the Philippians is also indicated by the all-inclusive words in these verses — **all** (v. 3), **always, every, you all** (v. 4). They are never far from his mind.
  - ✓ For what does Paul thank God in relation to the Philippians? That's the Q vv. 3-6 answers.

### • Thank God for the PEOPLE of the Past (v. 3)

- ✓ While Philippians is one of the warmest and most affectionate letters Paul wrote, it had been about 10 years since he'd seen them. Why did he remember them so fondly?
  - Paul was prevented by the Holy Spirit from traveling to several other places and directed to go to Philippi; when he arrived there weren't enough people to support a synagogue so he went "outside the gate" of the city and found only a small group of women praying (**Acts 16:13**). That group of women became the foundation of the church in Philippi — the first European converts.
  - While some Philippians were converted in **Acts 16:14ff**, after he cast a demon out of a young slave-girl, he was arrested, beaten, and thrown into jail (**16:22-24**). So he sang (**v. 25**)! And the jailer and his family were converted and baptized (**16:31-33**).
  - The church was comprised of poor believers, but they were particularly generous (2 Cor. 8:1ff).
  - That Paul remembered these people was not accidental — **all my remembrance** indicates that he was intentionally working to remember the past and remember the past with gratitude.
- ✓ Here is a good lesson for us. Don't be afraid or angry about your past. Do frame your past in the context of God's grace to you. Remember the past through the lens of God's kind actions to you.
  - What are the circumstances and people of the past three months that have changed your lives? Can you remember these circumstances with gratitude? Hard days does not mean "bad days."
  - As with the Philippian church, sometimes we only gain a perspective that helps us be grateful through the passage of time (10 years in their case). What are the circumstances and people of your distant past that God has used to shape you into the man or woman that you are? Paul also says to give thanks in everything (every circumstance; **1 Thess. 5:18**). Have you been doing that for the past three months? Have you done that for the hardest things you've endured?

- Thank God with **INTENTIONAL, JOYFUL** Prayer (v. 4)

- ✓ Paul is constantly remembering the Philippians and he is constantly praying for them — ***always offering prayer...every prayer***. He is doing for them what he will compel them to do (4:6).
  - The word he uses for prayer refers to *intercession* for others. He remembered them and recognized their needs and anticipated future needs (2:2, 4; 3:2; 4:2).
  - What is notable in this verse is that he is praying intentionally and purposefully, but also ***with joy***. The ability to pray for the Philippians was a joy to Paul. That he was positioned to pray for others and for them to God was a joy to Paul. He is God's agent to pray to God for them.
  - To pray with joy doesn't mean that we pray for people that don't have problems; it means that we pray with contentment and peace (trust) for those who do have trouble.
- ✓ One commentator says about this verse, "Intercessory prayer sometimes involves disappointment and pain." [MacArthur] That doesn't mean, however, that we shouldn't pray or can't pray joyfully.
  - Paul's own circumstances couldn't rob him from the joy of praying for others (he was in prison when he wrote this letter). And the circumstances of the Philippians couldn't rob him of joy.
  - Joy is possible because it is rooted in God and a recognition of His grace to us (cf. 4:4)
  - As you are praying, are you always praying with joy — with satisfaction / contentment in God?

- Thank God for the **GOSPEL** (v. 5)

- ✓ We might translate ***in view of*** as "because of..." (reason). There is a particular reason why Paul can pray with joy — because they have been ***participating in the gospel***...
  - The word "participate" is "fellowship" — they have partnered with Paul in working for the expansion and influence of the gospel. How? They housed Paul (Acts 16:14), prayed for Paul (Phil. 1:19), they evangelized with Paul (4:3), and they gave to Paul's support (4:10ff).
  - All these actions were either direct gospel activities or enabled others to do gospel work.
  - They did that from the beginning of their association w. Paul to the day of His writing (10 yrs).
- ✓ There are three subtle reminders here:
  - *Give thanks for the work of the gospel in your own life.* Yes, you might have had hardship. Can you imagine the hardness of the hardship without the gift of the gospel to sustain you?
  - *Give thanks for the privilege of ministering the gospel to others* (1:12-13, 18; 2 Cor. 2:15-16). God has not only saved us, but He also uses us gospel ambassadors. And these days particularly, in so many different ways, is giving us that opportunity.
  - *Give thanks that ministry is a partnership* — we are not alone; Paul couldn't do it alone and neither could the Philippians. It took both working together and that's what God provided for them — and it is akin to what He has also provided for us, a team of people serving together.

- Thank God for Completed **SANCTIFICATION** (v. 6)

- ✓ One of the blessings of the gospel is how it frees us from sin and matures us (e.g., Gal. 5; Rom. 6-8).
  - That blessing is part of Paul's prayer of gratitude for the Philippians — he is confident that God has begun the work of salvation and sanctification and He will complete (**perfect**) it.
  - Paul's confidence is not in their own righteousness abilities, but in God's ability to mature them.
  - He will say something similar in **2:13**. Spiritual maturity is always ultimately the work of God.
  - And God will fully mature the believer in Christ — **perfect** means "complete," or "mature." God always finishes what He begins. He will finish our salvation when we trust Christ. If our salvation has begun, then it will be finished (**Rom. 8:30**) — no one drops out. He will get us to **the day of Christ Jesus** — the day He returns — and then into and through eternity (when X reigns).
- ✓ This is an encouragement because it means that even in trials (and the Philippians — and some of us — have many), God is not losing us. Trials don't mean that God's power has been overwhelmed.
- ✓ Rather, trials are often the means that God uses to bring us to maturity (**3:8-10; Rom. 5:3-5**). In these days, what are the realities of your heart that God has exposed and changed? Give thanks.

- Thank God for **FELLOWSHIP** (v. 7)

- ✓ It is right for Paul to **feel this way** — thankful (v. 3) — because of the partnership of the Philippians with him. **Partakers** is a form of the word "fellowship." Specifically, they have shared **grace**.
  - Paul is probably thinking about how they provided for him while he ministered (e.g., **4:15-16**).
  - They shared with him while he was **imprisoned** (in Rome) and during his legal difficulties, when he was having to defend himself after his arrest (Acts 22:1ff). Those **defenses** ultimately proved to **confirm** the gospel as people were brought to faith (**Phil. 1:13-14**).
  - Even though he was "alone" in Rome, through their prayers and gifts, he wasn't alone.
- ✓ There are seasons of life (even outside of COVID-19) when we feel alone: it seems that only we are faithful, that no one else cares, that all have deserted us. Friend, if you are in Christ, you are not alone. You have an army of believers walking alongside you to Christ. Give thanks for the ones God has given to minister the Scriptures to you, pray with you, exhort you, and share with you. This has been one of my repeated themes of gratitude these months; God is keeping us through fellowship.

- Thank God for Holy **LONGINGS** (v. 8)

- ✓ In v. 7 Paul says the Philippians are **in my heart** and in v. 8, that he **longs for you with affection of Christ Jesus**. Paul has a yearning and eagerness for the Philippians. He's "homesick."
  - This affection was not because of his personal connection with them, but because of his connection with them that is in Christ. It is because Christ loves them that he loves them. Because Christ has bonded them together in relationship he wants to be with them.
  - "His pulse beats with the pulse of Christ; his heart throbs with the heart of Christ." [Lightfoot]

- ✓ One of my sorrows on Friday recordings these months has been to sing and pray and preach to chairs — the absence of people's voices in corporate worship has been deafening. My longing was to be with you in worship. And my greater joy was your longing to be with one another as well. Repeatedly you spoke of missing each other, desiring to be with each other, and missing the fellowship of one another. Thank God for this bond of holy love we share with one another.
- As you look back at the past — the past three months, plus all the other years of your life — God uses our memories to stimulate us to be thankful. Are you giving thanks for these months? Will you? We have much for which we can give thanks.

## 2. Trusting God for the Future (vv. 9-11) — when we pray, we are saying we trust Him for what is ahead

- ✓ We covered this passage in a sermon in January, so let's just remind ourselves and summarize now
- ✓ This is a reminder of the need for love as the bond of unity in the church body.

### • Trust God for ABOUNDING Love (v. 9a)

- ✓ The love of the Philippians (for each other and Paul) was abundant (**abounding**). It wasn't enough. They needed more. They were to cultivate ever-increasing love for one another (cf. **1 Th. 4:9-10**).
- ✓ However much we love, there is always room (and need) for more. Raye Jeanne has never said — and no wife has ever said — “you can stop loving me now; I have enough love...”
- ✓ There is always room to grow in love (as trials and trouble often demonstrate).
- ✓ Ask and trust God for us to grow in love for Christ and love for one another.

### • Trust God for DISCERNING Love (v. 9b)

- ✓ Love that is **knowledgeable** and **discerning** is love that is not sentimental, but informed by the truth — it is perceptive to moral and spiritual needs. It loves the way people need us to love.
- ✓ Are we watching for the spiritual needs of others and being committed to love accordingly?

### • Trust God for VITAL Love (v. 10a)

- ✓ Love that **approves the things that are excellent...** is a love that is life-giving and life-sustaining. It pursues the things that will give and sustain spiritual life in others. The desire of this love is to be **sincere** (genuine, pure, morally ethical) and **blameless** (not creating stumbling blocks for others).
- ✓ Does our love lead us and others to grow in Christ?

### • Trust God for ENDURING Love (v. 10b)

- ✓ When Paul prays for love that lasts **until the day of Christ**, he is asking for a love that is persistent. It is a settled and enduring love that doesn't diminish, even when dealing with difficult people.
- ✓ Is our love for others secure (or does it falter when they falter)?

- Trust God for **FRUITFUL Love (v. 11a)**

- ✓ A love that is ***filled with the fruit of righteousness*** is a love that is spiritually profitable. It produces the kinds of works that God designed us to do when he saved us (**Gal. 5:22-23**).
- ✓ Are we praying for others to make spiritual progress? Are we praying for our own spiritual progress? Are we working diligently for our own spiritual progress?

- Trust God for **GOD-GLORIFYING Love (v. 11b)**

- ✓ The goal of Paul's prayer and love in the Philippian church body was ***the glory and praise of God***.
- ✓ He is the end and purpose of everything we do — and always will be (cf. **2:11**).
- ✓ Is what are doing bringing glory to God and honor to Him? (I am thankful that so much of the ministry that's been done the past three months seems to pass this test.)

### **CONCLUSION:**

- ✓ We have already prayed for the past and future, but let's pray again.
- ✓ Let's give thanks and ask God to enhance our love for Him and each other.

### **COMMUNION:**

You have already received the communion elements; if you are a believer...

As we prepare ourselves for communion, the musicians are going to play to allow you time to prepare your hearts to take these elements in a worthy manner.

### **BENEDICTION:** Anglican Benediction