



PRAYING FOR POTENTIAL NOT JUST PROBLEMS

Prayer: Our Foundation & Our Future | 7.26.26

JoAnn Hummel

(The following text is automatically generated and has not been edited)

JoAnn Hummel 0:01

I've been thinking about the '90s, early '90s, when I came into almost 2000. It was such years of explosive growth with a very young team, and of course, we were hungry for solutions. So we went to conferences and we contacted consultants who many times acted as insultants for what we were doing. But we were trying to fix healthy problems. Church growth is a healthy problem. In the first century, there were lots of problems in churches that Paul was planting. Some churches were pretty naughty, and so Paul had to like help them through that. And some had doctrinal problems, and Paul worked them through that. But in Philippians, it was not like that. They weren't perfect, but they really didn't have the kind of problems other churches had. In fact, even though there was relational tension brewing and there maybe was some faith drift on the way for the Philippians, Paul calls them his joy and his crown. In fact, in this letter alone, he uses the word joy or rejoicing 16 times, like he loves these people. He's so proud of them. When he writes this letter, he writes it because he's received a gift from them—a financial gift—and he's writing because he also got a report about them, how they're doing, how the church is really doing. And so this letter contains Hints and prayers for their growth for one another in love, and their growth in their love for God. So gratitude and growth are really the themes here, and the sermon text for today is verses nine through 11 of chapter one. So if you're there, we're going to jump in in a minute, and I think this prayer that Paul prays, we're going to look at. If we can lean into it and adopt it as our own, I think it can really expand the way we pray as Bent Tree, and I think it can grow our love for one another. Which, as we move into the future in this world, is absolutely necessary that we love one another, because how do people know about Jesus? Because we love one another. John 13 says that's the mark of Christians—they love one another. So I think this prayer can help us. But about nine years ago, about 50 bent treeers, we got them together, and we took them out to the Mediterranean, and we followed the footsteps of Paul, his church planting footsteps. And we ended up, we end up, we visited Philippi among many cities, and Philippi was the beachhead for the gospel in Europe. Paul intended to go to Asia. He ends up in Europe because Holy Spirit sends him there. And there, Paul, Timothy, Silas, and Luke, his little team that he was traveling with, they always started at a synagogue, and 10 men would be there, and so they evangelize that group. Is how they always began in new cities, but they didn't find a synagogue there. So they went down to the river and they found this group of proselytes or God worshippers, God fearers who were seeking the truth, and they found Lydia. So I'm going to show on the screen. You're going to see an icon that represents Lydia. She was a wealthy cloth merchant, and so she was a God-fearer, and she was down by the river with a small group of people seeking the Lord. And Paul comes and evangelizes. They were at the river. This is the Angusa River. It's called something different today, but this river runs outside of Philippi, and so we saw that river as well. It's fun to go to these places and say that's in the Bible. No, that's in the Bible. That's in the Bible, and you're really there. It anchors everything in history. Paul and his team evangelized and baptized there, and Lydia became Lydia's house became the church's headquarters, if you will. Later, baptizing, we were baptizing there too. A picture, and I want to turn around and point these out. So this is a picture of us baptizing. We had to do what Paul did, and so there on the right-hand side with the red hair is my friend Michelle Attar, our former adult ministry pastor, dear friend, she'll be here in August.

JoAnn Hummel 4:02

There's Kelly Conti to her left, getting ready to be dunked, and then standing right above Kelly is our former wonderful dear worship pastor and friend Scott Dyer, and then way in the back to the left, you'll see Patty Culver, who recently just went home to be with the Lord, our dear friend and her husband Peter, Patty served as one of our elders. So we were baptizing just like Paul had been baptizing there. And later, after their preaching caused a riot, Paul and Silas were jailed and left the city. And this is kind of a little look at what they say his jail may have looked like in Philippi. This isn't a Roman jail. This is—I

don't know who the guy is. I tried to look that out. He should have gotten out of the way. But anyway, I'm sure that's not the jailer. But this is kind of where they believe Paul was jailed with Silas. Their feet were in stocks, so they were completely immobilized. And if you want to read the whole story, you can act six. 16 through 21 is where you can go in the New Testament. But now join me into Philippians 1, and we're going to look at verses 9 through 11. But first, I want to build the context for you with three things: their partnership with Paul in the gospel, a prophetic statement Paul makes about the future, and then also this deep pity or love and affection Paul has for this church that prompts him to write. First is their partnership. Verses three through five say this: I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying for with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, the word partnership is the Greek word *koinonia*, which, if you ask any Bible-going Christian, they're going to say that's fellowship. What we really mean by that is swallowship. Like we're sitting around a dinner table or a lunch table, and we're eating and drinking, we're hanging out. This word is much deeper than that, it's more a startup than a hangout. So what Paul is saying is, these people, Lydia, the jailer who came to Christ, the guy who put Paul in jail, a demon-possessed girl who had the demon removed, became a part of this church. They rolled up their sleeves. First, they received the gospel, so they were partners in the fact that they received it. But they also shared the gospel with the people around them, the closest people to them. This is how the church grew. This is how our church grows. You come here, you become a Christian, you receive the gospel, you receive Christ, and then you want to share that with your friends. In fact, we could say that the Philippians were first-century benchers. They were experiencing and sharing Christ, the love of Christ. That's what they were doing. And so Paul says, "I love your partnership. I love your partnership. But he says it started from the first day, and what Paul means by this is that he, empowered by the Holy Spirit, birthed to this church. He's the father. He's the daddy of this church. It was his conversation with Lydia, the first convert in Europe. Think of that. From which probably most people in this auditorium come from. So he was. He feels fatherly affection and love for them, and now they're growing up. It's 10 years later, and so now they're not this baby church anymore. They're a growing church, and they're growing up. And Paul has joy like a proud father for their unbreakable bond. Paul, Christ, Philippians-this three-way bond, this partnership that they share cannot be broken. But then Paul makes a prophetic statement that really shows where his focus is. In verse six, he says, "I'm sure of this: that he, meaning Christ, who started a good work in you, will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Maybe you have on a T-shirt or a coffee mug the saying, "God hasn't finished with me yet, right? And I'm so glad He hasn't finished with us yet. I think we should put that as a warning on every name tag we make. Joanne, God isn't finished with me yet. See that as a warning, right?"

JoAnn Hummel 8:15

Sometimes we think people are perfected, and we are perfected in Christ. We are sealed and perfected in Him, and blameless and holy and righteous. The living out of that is sometimes less so, and that's what this means. God is going to complete this work that He started in you, but I don't really want to point that out. I want to go to the last part of this verse, the day of Jesus Christ, because this is unique to Paul, he uses this three times in the New Testament: twice in Philippians, once in First Thessalonians, and this is Paul's shorthand for Christ's return. It's that time when you and I are forever changed, all believers forever changed. We exchange our mortality, our ability to die, for immortality, to live forever, and we're given resurrected, glorified bodies. I can't wait for that. The more I age, the more I'm craving for that glorified body that has no pain and is strong again. This prophetic event was future to Paul. It's still future to us 20 centuries later, but it was Paul's horizon. It's like he did. He put that first, and then everything else leads up to that. He didn't just live his life thinking one day Jesus is going to come back. He said, "Jesus is coming back. This is how I should live my life. That's a very different perspective. So Paul's eyes were on Jesus, and you know, someone once told me, "We are where we look. We are where we look. Our perspective is so important. Our focus is vital. I'm told that runners, like really experienced runners, they train their eyes to look at. Ahead while they run, not at their feet. If they want the most efficient, best time of their run, they have to focus ahead. In our spiritual race of life, when disappointments and trials get heavy, we must do the same. We must focus our eyes on Jesus. Say to your neighbor, "Look at somebody next to you, and go, "Turn your eyes on Jesus. All right, do this to the other person. Turn your eyes to Jesus. Turn your eyes on Jesus. We should be saying this to each other all the time. Turn your eyes on Jesus. This is where Paul had his focus. You know what? The best way to do that is to pray. And at the end of the sermon, I'm going to have a prayer that takes 30 seconds for you to pray, that will turn your eyes on Jesus. It's so easy, it's so quick. We can do it. And the last thing that Paul says, as the context why he's writing this, is this deep pity that he has. Now I'm using pity because it's a P, and I wanted to rhyme with partnership, prophecy, and pity, because we think of pity as I feel so sorry for you people, right? Like I pity the people who have to breathe all the air from all the fires up north, right? Like I pity those people, but then they're like I pity you who live in Texas, and it's 112 degrees in the you know so on. So it's not that kind of pity. It's an old-timey word if you roll it back, and and it means mercy and a deep feeling of affection. That's

really what this means. And verse eight says, "For God is my witness how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. The word affection is this connection and compassion. Scholars tell us in the first century, people believe that the deepest feelings that you feel come from the viscera of your body, your liver, your kidneys, and your lungs. When I read that, I thought I would love to have seen a Hallmark store back in the first century, and their Valentine card display. I love you with my kidney, liver, and lungs. You know, like Valentine's Day didn't. I know you're all telling me that's not biblically accurate. There's no Valentine's Day. You're right. This is where my mind goes when I have too much time on my hands, right? So, but this idea that emotions come from the deepest part—we would say, "I love you with all my heart. They would say, "I love you with everything inside me, my entrails, all of that deep stuff. That's what he's saying.

JoAnn Hummel 12:31

I love you like that, and then he tells where that love comes from of Christ Jesus. This isn't Paul's emotional response. This is actually Paul's longing for them. Was like Christ's love for the Philippians, and it was moving through him. Was like a transfer. Like Christ was feeling this way for the Philippians, and he put it through Paul, and that's why Paul was longing for them to be longing to be reunited with them, because Paul is 1000 miles away, and it's a decade after he planted this church. But you know what? He's still longing for them. He has not forgotten them. And guess what? He's still interceding for them. They haven't dropped off his prayer list. They're so close to his heart. I know your secret. I do. I've been here long enough to know your secret. You're so glad that I'm finishing this series because Pastor Libman comes back next week. I know it. It's nice having all those guest speakers, but you want the guy, right? I understand it. I get it. I want him back. I was texting with him yesterday. But here's what you don't know. Maybe the secret you don't know. He misses you, us, more than we miss him. Because what I know about being a pastor is that there is this love that Paul is describing here for a church body, for the shepherd, his sheep are like the joy of his heart, the joy of his heart. So let me tell you, when that guy gets up to preach, he has been waiting to do it for 32 days, and just strap in because it's coming. But he loves this church. He loves us, and that's a beautiful thing. You know, it's interesting because now I'm not in full-time pastoral ministry, but I still feel that way. I walk into this building and I feel like a pastor in this church, even though I no longer fulfill that function, I still feel that mantle of love, that depth of love for my family. Now we've seen the context of the prayer. Let's look at the content of the prayer, and that starts in verse nine. Abounding love, the content of the prayer. Begins one sentence in the Greek, three verses, one sentence. Paul prays their love will grow. Verse nine, and I pray this that your love will keep on growing. So stop here and go circle the word love if you haven't your Bible. That's the topic. He prays for a lot of things, but they all go back to love, abounding love. So he's praying. Everything I say is about love. That's what Paul prays for the Philippians. He could have prayed about anything, and what does he pray about? What does he write about? He writes about love. That's what he's saying. And the word he chooses is the word we normally leave for God alone, which is agape. This and here's my definition: a self-sacrificing love. Think Jesus, initiated by the lover, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bestowed on the loved ones. That's us and the rest of the world. Without merit or condition, you can't earn it or lose it for the purpose of our flourishing. God created us to flourish, and so that's the kind of love that Paul is praying for them. That that love in you, given by God, initiated by Him, would keep on growing. So, keep on growing means an ongoing experience and expression, not just an experience of this love, but an expression of that love to other people. See, the Philippians already have love. Paul doesn't say, "I pray that you get love. He says, "I pray that your love grows. They already have this love. Paul saying it just needs to mature. It needs to grow a little more because he understands from Epaphroditus's report, that there are relational tensions underneath this church, which he addresses in Philippians chapter four. You can read it later. So Paul is praying that as they love God, their ability to understand how to best love one another will increase. One scholar writes about this particular verse. He says because Paul wrote that verse and love has no object, so it's not saying God love God or love others. Then it probably means both, and this is what he says about it.

JoAnn Hummel 17:18

Paul refers to love in its most comprehensive state, going in every possible direction, that the Philippians would be people of love as God is, that bent treeers would be people of love as God is, and I think that old verse, John 3:16, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. That one gives us three spheres where love can grow. For God, that's the first sphere. Sphere God. Our love for God can certainly grow and deepen. That love should keep on growing. For God so loved the world. That's the second dimension. Our love needs to grow for the world, not the world's systems, not the world's values, not worldly things, but the world God made this planet, this all of the stuff that He made beyond this planet, for the people God made, who are in His image, that's every person. That's where our love could really grow right now, right about now. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that's Jesus. And here's the third sphere: that whosoever believes in Him, that's the church. So our love can

grow for God. Our love should grow for the world. Our love should grow for each other. The three spheres that love can grow. I don't know about you, but I think the thing that puts barriers to love growing are our words. When I look back on 30 years of ministry, I think the things I regret most are words that I said-hurtful words. I wish I could take them all back. I wish I could roll back time and take them back. Have you ever said a hurtful word to someone? I'm sure y'all haven't. You're like so spiritually mature. You've probably ask your kids; they'll tell you if you've ever said a hurtful word. Someone has said, "Before you let something come out of your mouth, send your words through three gates. The first gate is it true? Second gate is it necessary? And the third gate is it kind? I believe that there are people hearing the sound of my voice and the teaching of this word, and today. Whenever you hear it, you are planning on saying something to somebody, or sending a text, or sending an email, because you're mad, or you're hurt, or you're disappointed, and you're you're kind of blasting. And I think this little thing is for you and for me. Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind? You want love to grow? Put your words through those three gates, and love will grow. I guarantee it. Money back guarantee. Okay. All right. Now let's talk about growing love. So there's a growing love that God has for us, and our love needs to grow. And now Paul talks about abounding love and how it should grow. So these next couple of things are the way that love would grow. We've talked about the spheres of love growing. We've talked about our words helping love to grow, but now this is how love will grow. The first one is love will grow as it knows. Love will know. Love will know. This is not about fact gathering. In verse 10, the beginning of it, he says, "Love will grow in knowledge and every kind of discernment. The knowledge is not fact gathering, but it's personal, experiential understanding of God and His truth through Christ and through the Word, living Word, written Word. Our faith should be informed. It should be morally perceptive. It should not be blind. Love is the same way. Love should be informed. Love should be morally perceptive and not blind. Let your love have knowledge, discernment, the ability to know the right thing to do in any given situation. Wow. Hebrews 5:14 says, mature Christians, ones who are maturing, eat the word of God like strong meat, and then as they process it, they practice it. They actually obey it and do it. And as they obey it and do it, they they learn to train their senses, their decision making, all of their thought process to discern between good and evil. This is what Paul. Your love, as it grows, should know. It should deepen in knowledge and discernment.

JoAnn Hummel 22:33

You should have a better handle as your love grows on what to say, what not to say, what to do? To do what really matters. That's what Paul is saying. Abounding love increasingly knows God's character and truth, and can communicate that truth. Get this with sensitivity and civility. Ooh, we need a little bit of that today, don't we? Sensitivity and civility. The second way love grows beyond no is to show it should demonstrate itself. It should be evident. The last part of verse 10, so that you may approve the things that are superior and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ. Approval is this examination and testing of things to make sure they're genuine. Maybe you've seen an old Western movie where that guy who's bowlegged comes out and he grabs a gold coin and he puts it in his mouth and like that, you know, and tests it for genuine. Or some guy who's looking over livestock like cattle and horses and he's feeling the legs of the horse. He's looking and it's they're they're testing and approving it to see what kind of soundness does it have? Is it genuine? Paul says your love should be like that. We should be able to bite down on you and go, oh, she's genuine, all right. Your love that comes forward and showing shows who you are. It should be congruent with your identity in Christ. Pure and blameless speaks to internally pure meaning right motives. Like I have when I'm making decisions, I have not selfish motives but pure motives, right motives. And then blameless is talking about your actions not putting a stumbling block in other people's way, being inoffensive. So making decisions based on the right motives, pure motives, and then your actions don't put roadblocks in front of people. Romans 14:13 says this: Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead, decide never to put a stumbling block or a pitfall in the way of your brother or sister. Abounding love will show in our biblically informed. Tested spirit-enabled decisions that lead to loving actions. Your love should know. Your love will know and grow. Did I back up on those? Show, no, grow. I was trying to do it backwards. That may be too much for me at my age to think backwards. I'm not sure. Let's do overflow. That's the last one. This is the last one. Your love will know. It will show. It will overflow because it's growing. Overflow. It says in verse 11, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. Filled with the fruit of righteousness. The fruit. What do you think of first of all? Fruit, fruit of the spirit. That's probably what he means. Now it's funny if you look in a commentary, it's like such an argument. Is he talking about fruit of righteousness meaning our salvation? Like righteousness comes to us after we receive Christ as our identity, our gift, it's the fruit of that righteousness. Or does it mean the behavior that comes from salvation? And I say yes, it's both. It's likely both because that's what Paul's doing in this letter. He's saying, Paul, Christ, Philippians, like we're all together. It's it's loving God and loving one another. That's really what he's talking about. So Paul prays their love will abound in the fruit of the spirit, which are behaviors of true Christ-like love. In fact, many scholars will tell you that the fruit of the spirit is actually just love, and all the other descriptions-joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control-those are ways that love

demonstrates itself. And whether you take that view or not, Christ is the one who produces. That's what Paul means when he says it's through Jesus Christ. The fruit of righteousness comes through Jesus Christ. Christ is the prompting cause of our fruitfulness. We're not doing this on our own. It's Christ who's causing the fruit and fullness through the Holy Spirit. And then Paul ends this little section, this prayer, with a doxology, which means a word of glory, and he means this to the glory and praise of God, meaning that the purpose of the fruit is to glorify and praise God, to lavish praise on God because He is due it all, amen. I don't know how many years ago it was.

JoAnn Hummel 27:46

It was when we first started doing summer hunger deliveries. Anybody? It's got to be a decade ago or more. But I was in one of those original delivery things. So I went with a lady with three young kids. I think they were all under six, and a big SUV, and we're crammed with boxes, and the boxes had food, and we're delivering them in the summertime to families who have food insecurity when school's not in session. So we had a list. We had the apartment where we were going. We had the list of the apartments we were supposed to go to. So we went up three flights of stairs. I could still do that then, so I know it was probably 10 years ago. And I'm with little kids, and the gal has the box that we're bringing, and then there are wee little bags of stuff, and we ring the doorbell. I'll never forget it. And door opens, and we're expecting to see an adult. And we look down. It's this little kid, and he looks through the door, and he's looking at us. He's looking at the mom with the big books. He's looking at me with little kids in the bags. And he almost shuts the door on us. But we hear him say as he's kind of closing the door to lean back to his mom, "Mommy, mommy, the angels are here. He's not wrong. When our love overflows, people will think that's God doing that for me, not that's Joanne doing that for me. I feel like that's a gift from God to me, and He's not wrong. That delivery to that little boy was a heaven to earth kind of moment, and I'm so glad I experienced it. It's not that the food was so great or the people were really angels. It's just in that moment that kid said, "I'm not invisible to God. Heaven sees me, and indeed heaven did. So Paul has ended his prayer, and what can we take home with us in our little carryout bag for this prayer of abounding love? Well, I probably forgot to mention that when Paul is writing this, and he's praying. This prayer, he's once again in prison. As Pastor Libbon said, whenever he went to a new town, he would just check the prison out because he was going to be there sooner or later. So he's in the prison and he's awaiting trial. He's eventually going to be beheaded by Emperor Nero. He says this in verse seven. He says, "You have been partners with me and Grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. He's doing this from prison. So here are the two takeaways I saw in my study of this, and I hope it blesses you. The first one is don't let your chains narrow your praying. Paul didn't let that chain to another guy in a Roman prison stop him from interceding. That must have been funny for the guy chained. This is how he led people to Christ. He would be praying out loud for these, and then they would be interested. Some of us may feel confined today, bound not with literal chains, but emotional and situational chains. Maybe you're anxious or angry or resentment. You've been hurt or burned out. Your finances are in a wreck, or you've had a diagnosis. So many of my friends are struggling with health concerns. You're just too busy and overwhelmed, or there's family tension and disruption, divorce, anger—all of that. If you feel bound today by these kinds of chains, your circumstances may not change immediately, but you can trust God, lean into Him, not away from Him. As Steve was saying earlier, in the times when you feel like He's not coming through for you, it's time to lean in, put your eyes on Jesus, and pray. Pray not only for yourself but for other people. If you're in a season when things are really going well and you feel supported and you're strong, don't let comfort chains keep you from praying. Don't let comfort narrow your prayers. Intercede for people. Remember, we may feel bound, but prayer roams free. Do you ever think about that? No passport needed for your prayers. It can go across borders, time zones. It can speak every language.

JoAnn Hummel 32:16

You may be bound, but the prayer you pray, baby, that thing's running free. We have power beyond what we know; we just don't use it. Prayer is that power. So don't let chains narrow your prayers. And of course, the second one is widen your prayers. That's the positive. Widen your prayers, and here's how you widen them. You don't just pray about problems. That's when we typically pray. Somebody calls us and said, "So and so sick, will you pray for them? That's when we pray. When there's a need, did you ever think of praying for someone's potential?

Speaker 1 33:00

Who?

JoAnn Hummel 33:03

Praying for who they might become, praying for God's heart for them, praying for their strength, praying for their love to

abound. That's potential praying. Here's another way you can widen your prayers. We always pray for the struggling. That's awesome. I'm not saying don't pray for the struggling. We have to. But do you ever think of praying for the strong? Like before, Steve stood up there, and I've known Steve for years. Before he just said, "Gosh, this last couple of time when I first heard that song, I like I don't believe it. I don't think I've ever sat down with Steve and said to him, 'How can I pray for you? In that way, like, how are you doing? How is your heart? How can I pray? And I'm sad about that. Super sad. I hope he doesn't listen to this message. I don't know. But now I'm going to ask him because I said that, right? I didn't ask Dr. Bach. I know him very well too. And I've never sat down with that dear man, who is so strong, a seminary professor, world traveler, brilliant guy, and I never really asked him about it. So here's what I want us to do: I want us to pray. And before we pray, I wanted this declaration for us as we are thinking about our next 50 years. Here it is: because our love abounds, we will never stop praying for each other. You know, this church was built on prayer, and it's going to take prayer to make it continue to grow. Because our love abounds, and we will never stop praying for each other. We will ask God to form people rather than to fix them. We will pray for others' potential in Christ, not only for their problems. Now I'm going to put a prayer up on the screen for you, and I want you to pray. I'm gonna give you 30 seconds to pray this prayer. It'll be up on the screen. You can pray it, or you can pray it by using your hand. Say, Lord, may their love grow. No show overflow. Done. Pray their love will grow. No show overflow. Then you've prayed Philippians one nine through 11. I want you to think of someone who's strong and someone who's struggling in your life. And when I say 123 go, let this whole place be praying for a strong person, a struggling person, that their love might love might grow, know, show an overflow. Ready, and go. Father Bentry will soon be 50 years old. We praise you for that. Thank you for what you're doing in Bentry. Now cause our love for each other and for you to grow more and more in knowledge and discernment. Help us make the wisest choices from right motives without causing offense to anyone. Fill our lives with fruitfulness so we bring you glory when Jesus returns, and all God's people said, "Amen."