

Learning to Love Others

Philippians 1:7-11

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As I've been reflecting on the 120 years of history and the heartbeat of Edgewood, I've been struck by the abundance of love for God and for others demonstrated by God's people. This week, I recorded a 4G podcast episode with long-time member and resident historian Diane Carnithan. When I asked her what the heartbeat of Edgewood is, she answered quickly, "*the people!*" I agreed with her. You can find this episode on your podcast app, or on our YouTube channel or Facebook page.

20 years ago, when Edgewood was celebrating 100 years of faithful gospel ministry to our neighbors and the nations, Pastor Brown, who served here for 44 years, wrote this in an article: "*Today, Edgewood is filled with some of the finest Christian people you will ever meet this side of eternity. I have often said that there is no place I would rather be, no people I would rather serve, and no congregation I would rather pastor than the Edgewood Baptist Church. The book of Philippians expresses my feelings well.*"

Those are my sentiments as well. This week, at our Growth Group, I was encouraged by words of affection expressed by the members of our group. In fact, there was so much love flying around that I became uncomfortable. In response, I told them how much I love them and how joyful it is to be one of the pastors at a church that loves God, people, and the preaching of God's Word.

Pastor Brown concluded his article by quoting a section of Philippians 1:3-6, which was our text last weekend where we learned how *God will complete His work in us as we partner with Him in His work.*

- 1. We are servants and saints.**
- 2. We are positioned at a place for His purposes.**
- 3. We have been granted grace and peace.**
- 4. We can have joy because of Jesus.**
- 5. We are partners in the gospel.**
- 6. We are all in process.**

BTW, if you want to go deeper into Philippians, I recommend the new book by Randy Frazee called, *The Joy Challenge*. We were encouraged last weekend to

read the entire Book of Philippians at least once a week between now and Easter. How many of you have already read it through at least once? I've been enjoying reading comments on the Edgewood Facebook page where people are posting their favorite passages from Philippians. I'll be sharing some of this feedback in the weeks to come.

Related to that, I have permission to share part of an email from Edgewood member Brenda Verstraete.

So happy we are studying my favorite book! My life verse is Philippians 1:6. And here's why: The first year after I was saved, I was disciplined by a group of women I later learned were all AWANA leaders. So, the next year, guess what? I became an AWANA leader. After the first leaders meeting, I came home worried and told Terry, "I don't know WHAT I got myself into!" I couldn't even pronounce AWANA. I began memorizing verses right along with the kids and came across Philippians 1:6. God was going to be the One who would help me in this new adventure. He was going to accomplish what He got me into. After a few years, I became the director. Once again, I had to lean on God to accomplish His purpose...

Now with Terry's stroke and the challenges we face, I have been, unequivocally, over my head. But God continues to be faithful to help me navigate these waters. Philippians 1:6 is the backbone of my trust in Him to accomplish His purposes in me. So thankful for those years in AWANA where I memorized Scripture that are still with me today. And He pulls them up from my memory when I need them.

"I am confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in [me] will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Learned it in the King James back then.)

Would you please stand as we read Philippians 1:7-11 together?

"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. 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.

Here's our main idea: *When you love someone, you'll lift them up in prayer. If you need help loving someone, pray until you love them.*

Speaking of needing help loving someone, Packers fans were not too happy last Sunday when some Bears players tried to do the "Lambeau Leap" after their game-winning field goal. You can see fans yelling at them and pushing them back onto the field. However, one of the best examples of loving your enemies also happened during this game when Bears player Jaylon Johnson knelt on one knee to pray for a member of the enemy team, Christian Watson, who had suffered a significant injury. Tracy Czekalski sent this story to me and wonders if he was actually praying for the Bears to win, and not for the player!

Paul wanted the Philippians to know, *"I have you in my head, I have you in my heart, and I have you in my prayers. We're a band of brothers and sisters on mission, and on our knees for one another, so we can glorify God by making disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations."* Let's learn from this model prayer.

1. Express feelings. Paul is sometimes portrayed as a stern man, but in verse 7, Paul had no trouble expressing his feelings for the Philippians: ***"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."*** While we don't want to be run by our feelings, Paul models the importance of expressing affection for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The phrase, ***"you all"*** is used three times in verses 7-8 and a total of nine times in the letter. Paul did not exclude anyone and wanted to communicate that every believer is wrapped up together with every other believer. The phrase, ***"hold in my heart"*** means, *"to have and to hold continuously."* That leads to a question. Do you have that kind of intense affection for *every* Christian you know, even if they are different from you?

In verse 8 he described the depth of his feelings, even calling God to the witness stand: ***"For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."*** The word ***"yearned"*** is very forceful. It means, *"to ache and strain after, to desire earnestly."* This was the strongest and most tender

expression in Greek to denote the intensity of one's attachment to another. It literally means that his "bowels" were stirred up. In our language, we might say he had ardent affection as he groaned in his gut for them. Notice the source of these feelings came from "*Christ Jesus.*"

This was not a one-time emotional expression for Paul as we see later in Philippians 4:1: "*Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.*" His feelings of fondness are on display in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 as well: "*So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.*" In 2 Corinthians 7:3, he said, "...*you are in our hearts, to die together and live together.*"

Last week we learned the believers at Philippi were in Paul's head as he remembered their partnership with him. Here we see they were also in his heart because they were joint partakers of God's grace. This makes me think of the high priest who wore a special garment called the *ephod*. According to Exodus 28:6, the breastplate was made of "*gold, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and of fine twined linen, skillfully worked.*" Mounted on and into the breastplate were twelve precious stones, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

In Exodus 28:29, we're given the reason for this: "*So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breast piece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the LORD.*" Having the names of the tribes over his heart helped him to pray from his heart.

Paul didn't wear an ephod, but he carried the names of the Philippian believers "on his heart" as he entered the "holy place" of prayer. He brought them to God with "regular remembrance" as he made requests for them.

Let's make sure we place people on our hearts. When they are, we can't help but pray for them. *When you love someone, you'll lift them up in prayer. If you need help loving someone, pray until you love them.*

2. Intercede with focus. Last week we learned from verse 4 how Paul prayed: he always prayed "*with joy.*" In verses 9-10, we'll see *what* he prayed. My guess is most of know we're supposed to pray but struggle with focus when we

pray. I wonder if it's because we don't always know what to say when we pray, or maybe we get sleepy when we start interceding for people.

That reminds me of the woman who sheepishly approached her pastor after a service and said, *"I hope you didn't take it personally when my husband walked out during your sermon."* The pastor replied, *"I did find it a little disconcerting."* The wife continued, *"Please know that it's no reflection on your preaching...he's been walking in his sleep ever since he was a child."*

At the very mention of prayer or preaching, some people start yawning. How many of you get sleepy when you're praying? The disciples did, too. Let's circle back to an action step from a couple weeks ago related to a prayer for our Bible reading: *"Father, hold my mind's attention and awake my heart's affection."*

Paul's intercession focused on four main requests which have to do with Christian growth. He doesn't simply tell the Philippians he is praying for them. He tells them *what* he is praying for them. Do you want to encourage someone? Tell them *that* you are praying and *what* you are praying.

- **Abounding love.** The first request is found in verse 9: ***"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more..."*** The word ***"abound"*** means, *"to exceed, to overflow excessively, to pass the goal with some left over."* The picture is a river rushing over its banks or a glass of water filled to overflowing. The word is also used to describe a cascading waterfall that never stops. The words ***"more and more"*** add to the intensity of affection. When you find yourself floundering in your prayers, ask God to grant limitless love to those you're praying for.

This week, I asked a member of our Mainspring Young Adult group what God was teaching her. She smiled and said, *"He's teaching me a whole lot of love. One relationship was taken from me and now I have eight more with my new friends in Mainspring."*

This word for ***"love"*** is agape, which is an unconditional love and comes only from God as 1 John 4:7 says: ***"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."*** As one pastor puts it, *"There is no Christianity without love."*

Let's pray that our own love would splash out, and that it would cascade over every Christian we know. One way we can gauge our growth in love is to ask if we're more loving this year than we were last year. By God's grace and enablement, I want to love more people more deeply as I get older. Unfortunately, as we age, we often get the disease called, "The hardening of the categories." Instead of becoming more loving, we often default to judgmentalism and legalism.

To say it another way, love is a verb, meaning it's action oriented. We see this in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. While this passage is read at many weddings, for good reason, these words are directed to a body of believers who were not very good at showing love to each other: ***"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."***

During a game show, the host asked a contestant this question, "Tell us some of the blunders your wife has made." The man quickly replied, "I can't remember any." The host was shocked and pressed him, "Oh, surely you can remember something!" "No, I really can't," said the contestant. "I love my wife very much and I just don't remember things like that." What a great example of love keeping no record of wrongs.

Since loving others doesn't come naturally for us, or for others, we need to pray for love to superabound, and we need to practice love. Paul prayed something similar in 1 Thessalonians 3:12: ***"and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you."***

I talked to someone a while ago who told me she's been praying this request for over six months for someone she has struggled with. In fact, this prayer was up on her refrigerator so that it was always in front of her. She took the format right from Philippians: "And it is my prayer that [the person's name] would have love that abounds more and more..." After praying this prayer faithfully, God answered and finally reconciled their relationship.

- **Increasing knowledge.** The next way to pray is to ask God to give people "**knowledge**." The invitation to grow in knowledge of Jesus is

found throughout the Bible. Here's one in 2 Peter 3:18: ***“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*** Let's ask God to grow people in knowledge of Christ and for them to know Christ more intimately as Paul expressed in Philippians 3:10: ***“That I may know him and the power of his resurrection...”***

As we learned last weekend, we're all in process. I love being part of a church where there are so many children who are learning and so many new people who are just starting out in their faith! We're here to help teach and to train as we make disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations.

- **Expanding discernment.** Limitless love leads to increasing knowledge and ***“all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent...”*** We all need wisdom not to only discern the difference between what is evil and what is excellent, but also to know how to choose between the good, better, and best.

One way to expand our discernment is through regular and consistent Bible reading as we see in Hebrews 5:14: ***“But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”***

Have you ever wondered why cashiers hold up money and look at it when you buy something? They're checking for a security thread, a plastic strip embedded within the paper which is visible when held against a source of light. This helps them verify if the bill is authentic and not counterfeit.

The word ***“discernment”*** in classical Greek was used for testing money to see if it was pure. It has the idea of verifying to determine what is real and valuable. In other words, we pray for discernment so that instead of living mediocre lives, we can know what really matters. When you intercede in this way for others you are asking God to give them the ability to sort through all their choices and activities to have the wisdom to choose the most excellent way.

We need discernment related to doctrine and decisions. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 challenges us not to just accept what we see on the surface: ***“But test everything; hold fast what is good.”*** When we're weak in wisdom and have a discernment deficit, James 1:5 challenges us to simply ask for it,

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”

- Knowledge asks the question, *“What is right?”*
- Discernment asks the question, *“What is best?”*
- **Growing holiness.** As this prayer progresses, next Paul prays for believers to grow in holiness: ***“...and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”*** The word ***“pure”*** means, *“pure, unmixed, and transparent.”* It literally refers to being “tested by sunlight.” In ancient times the best pottery was thin and would often crack in the oven and need to be thrown away. Dishonest dealers would fill in the cracks with a special wax which blended in with the color of the pottery so no one could see it. In the poorly lit shops, the unsuspecting customer could easily buy some damaged goods. People learned to take the stoneware outside to hold it up to the light of the sun. Any cracks would show up right away. Honest artisans would stamp a caption on the bottom of their product that read *sine cera*, which meant, *“without wax.”* This is the background to our word sincere.

The word ***“blameless”*** means, *“without offense, without any cause of stumbling.”* Paul is praying for believers to be sincere and set apart, so they are ready to stand before the Son on the ***“the day of Christ.”***

Warren Wiersbe suggests two good tests for us to follow:

- Will what I’m doing cause others to stumble?
- Would I be ashamed if Jesus returns while I’m doing this?

This week, after watching reports about the devastating fire in California, and listening to reporters describe it as “unquenchable” and “apocalyptic,” I wrote a post for Facebook called, “Worries About the World” and shared ten biblical lessons to help us stay grounded. There are printed copies available at the Welcome Center.

BTW, if you’re wanting to help financially, I’d encourage you to direct your giving directly to Samaritan’s Purse. I did see this update on Friday: *“Samaritan’s Purse is monitoring the fires in California and will be*

responding to help as soon as they are contained, and officials allow us into these communities.”

As I was reflecting on the phrase “**day of Christ**” in Philippians, I was reminded of what Jesus said about Hell when I was watching video of the fires. He referred to it as “**the hell of fire**” in Matthew 5:22, the “**eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels**” in Matthew 25:41, “**unquenchable fire**” in Mark 9:43 and “**eternal punishment**” in Matthew 25:46.

2 Peter 3:10-12 gives a red flag warning to each of us: “**But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be BURNED UP and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be SET ON FIRE and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they BURN!**”

One reporter made this statement with the fire raging around her: “*We need to heed the warnings to get out when officials issue them...this is the reality of it...the harsh reality that there is nothing left...there’s no telling how destructive the fire will be...it’s horrifying.*”

Let’s heed the warnings found in the Bible so we can be “**pure and blameless for the day of Christ.**” The only safe place is to find our refuge in the Redeemer.

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3. Expect fruit. Paul expects two results from his intercession.

- **Living right lives.** Listen to the first part of verse 11: “**Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ...**” When’s the last time you prayed for someone to be filled with fruit? That’s difficult for some of us because we may be jealous of what God does in the lives of others. We may secretly want others to fail, just so we look better. Not so with Paul. He was passionate about praying that fruit would form and

ripen in the lives of the Philippian believers because, as Jesus said in Matthew 7:16, ***“You will recognize them by their fruits.”***

The word ***“filled”*** means to be completely filled like a cup to the brim. This fruit of ***“righteousness”*** is the result, or product, of staying connected to Christ. As followers of Jesus, we are called to bear fruit as Jesus said in John 15:5: ***“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*** If we unplug from the vine, we will never be fine. You could put this request in simple terms and pray something like this, *“Father, fill this person so they will flourish and be fruitful.”*

- **Giving Glory to God.** When we pray, our goal should always be to give all the glory to God as we praise the fame of His glorious name as we see in last part of verse 11: ***“...to the glory and praise of God.”*** God’s glory is the totality of all His perfection. When we recapture His wonder, we can’t help but worship Him and when we see growth, we will give God glory because He’s the source of it.

We see again how this prayer is sequential. In John 15:8, Jesus makes it clear that spiritual fruit that comes through Jesus Christ gives glory to God: ***“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”*** As Psalm 115:1 declares: ***“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!”***

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Here’s a summary of what we’ve learned.

1. **Let’s express our feelings.**
2. **Let’s exercise focus by praying for abounding love, increasing knowledge, expanding discernment, and growing holiness.**
3. **Let’s expect the fruit of living right lives and giving glory to God.**

I’d like us to pray this passage right now. First, we’ll each pray it quietly for a couple family members. Second, we’ll use this prayer to pray for fellow followers of Christ. Finally, when we’re finished, I’ll use it to pray for the Edgewood family.

“And it is my prayer that _____’s love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that _____ 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.”

At the top of his music, the classical composer Johann Sebastian Bach would often put the initials “J. J.” (“Jesus Juva”) which means, “*Jesus help me.*” When he finished, he would write three letters at the bottom: “S.D.G.” (“Soli Deo Gloria”) which means, “*To God alone be the glory.*” He would start his work by asking Christ for help, and end by giving all glory to God.

Let’s live lives that sing the doxology, giving all praise and glory to God alone.

Closing Song: Doxology