

# **“THAT YOUR LOVE MAY ABOUND.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Philippians 1:9-11**

## **Introduction.**

Do any of you still have some unopened gifts under your Christmas tree? I'm not talking about gifts waiting for someone to come home so they can be opened. I'm talking about a gift given to you, but you just haven't opened it yet. It is safe to say all your gifts have been opened.

Yet in the Christian life we have been given gifts that we have not opened, or at least very infrequently. All of us feel the regret or remorse in our own neglect of the gifts of God's Word and the gift of prayer. You are not alone in this, I feel it, we all feel it.

God wants us to have His gifts, His blessings, His benefits in our life and He has designed a path for that to happen. The path is prayer. We have not because we pray not. We will have when we ask and seek and knock. But it also matters what you ask for.

When Paul writes his letters to the various churches he gives us a glimpse into his prayer life. One thing that stands out in his prayers for the Christians in the various churches is he doesn't pray like us. He doesn't ask for the things we ask for. He reaches higher, he has much loftier aims.

Paul is a pastor and he has a pastor's heart. He loves his people, he loves the church, and it is his great affection that leads him to desire the very best blessings of God in this life. He is intentionally going after something good for those whom he prays.

This is a prayer inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore answered by our Heavenly Father. I am calling us to pray for First CRC corporately and each other individually asking the Father in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit to answer this prayer. Think with me about how we can pray this prayer for each other.

This is Paul's prayer for the Christians in the church in Philippi in northern Greece. This is the Holy Spirit's prayer for the Christians in the church in Lynden in northern Washington.

Paul makes a brief prayer with very specific requests for definite things. In one sentence in three verses he says what he prays for and why he prays for it.

### **Phil. 1:9**

Paul prays their love would abound, more and more. With Paul there is never a status quo, never a point of satisfaction and contentment when it comes to spiritual things. He is always pressing on, reaching further up and further in. In these things where is unlimited potential for growth.

Not just love, not just more love, but love that abounds more and more. He places no limitation on this prayer request. He is asking God to do more and more, more than we ask or imagine. Is our love here growing? Is it overflowing? Do outsiders notice it? Could it grow even more?

When I talk to young couples getting married I tell them the love they have for each other at the beginning will not be enough to sustain their marriage. If it remains passive or static, they are in trouble. Their love must be an active, dynamic, growing love to survive the challenges ahead.

Agape love is not passive, vague, sentimental, self-servicing, but self-sacrificing, seeking out the very best interest of the other person.

This is a prayer we would love the things of God more than the fleeting things of this world.

Do you know the Father's unceasing, steadfast, abounding love for you? Has this season spoken to you at all about how great is the Father's love for us that He should send His only Son to us as a baby, to save us from our sins?

None of us has arrived at the destination, at the goal. We have only made at best partial progress in the Gospel, in our love for God and each other.

This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

**Phil. 1:10**

So that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

So that, here is the why. So that we are able to discern and approve and test what is best. This is the very definition of Christian wisdom, that it is able to know what is best, good, right. We begin with knowledge and move to practical application of that knowledge in discernment.

When we love God by knowing who He is and knowing His will for us, it leads us to test and approve and examine all the decisions and choices in my life. Think about all the hundreds of choices we all make every day and whether they are excellent, pure, blameless.

How should I respond to my spouse or parents or boss or friends or neighbors or other drivers?

How should I deal with that sinful temptation or desire?

What should I say or do in this situation?

What should I watch on TV or the internet?

Is this choice edifying, God-glorifying, loving?

Am I serving myself or others?

This is a prayer for God to guard and guide our affections, what we love, who we love. This is a prayer for our children and grandchildren as they grow and make choices.

This is a prayer for marriages, that spouses would love each other more than their hobbies, and parents would value time with their children more than time with their friends or work.

Is not our age an age more than any other that needs discernment? Discernment for all the conflicting opinions, conspiracy theories, false teachers, everything that passes itself off as truth on social media?

Do we desire excellence in our knowledge, in our thoughts, in our choices, in what we choose and in what we leave out? How much of what we spend our time on is a waste, second or third rate? Think about how much discernment we need to help our children to have discernment, to make wise choices, to say no to worthless or unfruitful things.

Paul is praying with a *long view*, with an eternal perspective, he is investing in the day of Christ. What choices are you making to live the kind of Christian life so that when you stand before Christ on that great day, you will not be ashamed and you will hear Him say: “Well, done, thou good and faithful servant, ... enter into the joy of the Lord.”

Paul is not saying we are or will be pure and blameless in this life. Paul knows the current path of our Christian life is a path of progressive, imperfect blamelessness and purity.

Think of the analogy between a cat and a pig. If a cat falls into mud, she immediately begins to lick and clean herself to remove every trace of the mud. That is the Christian. If a pig wanders into the mud, he will gladly wallow in it. That is the worldly person. He has found his own element. The Christian may fall seven times a day, but

he is always picking himself up, cleaning himself up with repentance and desiring to be pure and blameless (Geoff Thomas).

**Phil. 1:11**

Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.

Who wants a fruitless life, a life with no good coming out of it? This is a prayer for spiritually fruitful lives, a light shining in the darkness.

**Matthew 5:16** Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

This moves us to the outward life, this is the harvest, the outward expression. Good works to the glory of God.

Of course the source of this fruitfulness is Christ, He is the vine and we are the branches (John 15:1). We are spiritually unfruitful and unproductive until we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and sanctified by the Spirit, drawing from the life of Christ at work in us.

**Psalms 92:14** They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green.

The fruit of righteousness is the fruit of the righteousness of Christ that we already possess. We pursue righteousness with the clear understanding we have already been made righteous by Christ by faith.

Remember this is a prayer, it all depends on faith, and humble reliance on God by prayer. These are huge petitions, but remember you are asking God for them and by His power and grace we can never ask too much. Learn from Paul to pray huge prayers that look all the way to the end.

When this prayer is answered in your life you will have everything you need to endure the challenges and circumstances and difficulties of life

with love, understanding, discernment, excellence, joy and an anxious-free spirit to the glory of God.

Many of us do life in survival mode, just getting through the day, not thinking any bigger thoughts.

**Matthew 6:33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

### **Implications and application.**

Pray for your brothers and sisters at First Church, that we would all have a deeper hunger and thirst for prayer, that we would grow in being devoted to prayer. Pray for God's power to overcome prayerlessness, spiritual dryness and lack of faith.

Pray this Scripture. Take each petition and turn it into a paragraph prayer. Pray for abounding love. What might that look like? Pray I Corinthians 13:4-7 for you and for FCRC:

**I Corinthians 13:4-7** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Pray for the kind of knowledge and insight that promotes and builds up love. Pray your reading and studying of the Bible would result in new understanding and joy.

**II Timothy 3:16-17** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Pray for discernment and wisdom to know what is best, most excellent. Ask God to show you the difference between what is OK and what is

excellent, between what is acceptable and what is best. Pray this for our leaders, council, staff, and life group leaders.

Pray prayers that have a long view, that stretches out in time until Jesus comes. Pray for things that are eternal, not just immediate or temporal.

Pray the Holy Spirit would produce fruit in us that is in keeping with Christ's righteousness. Pray for God's help to seek first His righteousness.

Pray the Holy Spirit would prepare the way for a great harvest in our hearts, our homes, and our church. Ask God to add to His church those who are being saved and disciplined.

Pray we have a greater awareness of the greatness of God's glory that will lead to deeper worship and fuller trust and faith. Pray God is glorified in all that you do and in all that First Church does and that Christ is praised.

When was the last time you prayed like this for yourself, for your family, for your church? What is holding you back? Is it because what little time we take for prayer is filled up with little requests? It's not that we ask for too much, it is that we ask for far too little. Paul certainly wasn't afraid to ask for too much.

God intends to accomplish His saving purposes in our world and in our lives and families through prayer. God acts in response to prayer. In this way He is glorified and we are blessed.

Prayer is the sound made by a powerless, empty, blind, foolish soul talking to the utterly powerful, sovereign and sufficient God. It is the sound above all sounds that most pleases God.

Prayer is music to His ears. He delights in it. It is sweeter than any other sound, sweeter than our works, sweeter than preaching or teaching or serving.

Will you take this to heart, will you seriously consider changing your prayer life, what you pray for yourself, for your family, your spouse and children and grandchildren, your parents, your friends, your church and fellow church members and church leaders?

Prayer is the key to our life, to our blessing, to our families blessing, to our churches blessing. It is our most important work. One evidence of that is when we get to an age when we can't work like we did, we can still pray. God gives us this most important work to finish out our life.

We all need hope and grace and wisdom and strength going into 2025. I invite you and urge you to join me in praying this prayer and using this prayer reminder card to press further up and further in, may we become deeper Christians and a deeper church. Let's pray for bigger things for ourselves, for our spouses and children, for each other, for our church.

**Philippians 1:9-11** This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10. so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11. filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.