

All You Need is Love Philippians 1:9-11

What we pray for reveals what we desire most. So, what is it that you pray most urgently for? If we follow Paul's example, the answer will be growth in love that is guided by wisdom. That need trumps all others for there is nothing more powerful than love for showing the world the beauty of Jesus.

Have you ever thought deeply about the nature of prayer? Has it occurred to you that...

Your prayers actually reveal your greatest desires

- Prayer is revelatory – it reveals what you want most in life
- When I was a kid there was one thing I prayed for every single night as I got ready for bed – the only part of my childhood prayers I still remember to this day: “Please, God, give me good dreams and no nightmares.” I prayed that every night because I was desperate not have nightmares – that was my greatest desire as I got ready for bed every night, so it became the focus of my prayers.
- **Now as adults, our prayers get a bit more serious in nature. What do we pray for:**
 - o **healing** when we or someone we love is seriously ill
 - o **success** when we have a big test or job interview
 - o **relief** when we or someone we love faces emotional or physical pain
- All of these things are GOOD to pray for
 - o nothing wrong with praying for any of these – you should pray for these things
- But should healing, success, and relief be the focus of our prayer life?
- Or to ask it another way: if our prayers reveal our greatest desires, then would God have us desire healing, success, and relief above all else?

Let's see how Paul prays here in Phil 1

- very short prayer – just 3 verses
- it was hard and expensive to write in the ancient world – so you kept things short – you focused on just the most important things
- so when Paul has to keep a prayer short and focused... here's what he prays...

Read Phil 1:9-11

Notice: Paul doesn't pray for any of the 3 things we so often pray for: health, success, relief

- Doesn't mean he never prayed for those things! We know he did. We're told in other passages that we should pray for one another when we're sick. We should pray for God's help when we face a challenge in life. Those are good things. I'm sure Paul prayed often for those things. But...

When he had to focus on the one most important thing to pray for: he asked God for...

GROWTH IN LOVE THAT'S GUIDED BY WISDOM

- That fits perfectly with what we learned last week from Maslow's hierarchy of 5 basic needs
- The highest need on the list – our goal in a sense in life = self-actualization = growth
- humans were designed by God to grow, not just in stature, but in maturity – we were designed to grow up and become better versions of ourselves.
- God wants that growth for us even more than He wants health, success, or relief from pain

And since God created us, He gets to tell us what growth should look like – He gets to set the goal

God's Goal for our Growth – comes in 2 parts

1) Love...

- Notice that he doesn't specify the object of this love
 - o is it love for God, for family, for church, for those outside the church? All the above!
 - o Paul leaves it broad – he wants God to grow their love towards everyone
- Our challenge: this word "love" is largely misunderstood by our culture
 - o there is probably no word more in need of clarification than this word!
- What does "love" mean to the average American: Two options
 - o a strong desire for something
 - e.g. I love tacos – means I want them; I derive pleasure from eating them
 - o intense affection for someone
 - e.g. John is in love with Amy – love is the feeling of affection he has towards her; it's the feeling that causes him to want to be with her all the time
- The common idea in both of these usages is that love is a feeling I have
 - o I love something or someone because of how it makes me feel
 - o I love him or her or it because it gives me joy or pleasure
 - o So love according to our society is centered on what the lover gets from the thing loved
- But that's not biblical love... it's pretty much the exact opposite of biblical love!!
 - o There are a few Greek words in the New Testament translated "love"
 - o But the word here is *agape* – the most significant Greek word for love
- **Here's how the Bible defines agape love**
- 1 Cor 13:4-7 – most important description of agape love in Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- o Notice: the world would say that John loves Amy because Amy is patient, kind
 - o The Bible says John loves Amy because JOHN chooses to be patient, kind to her
 - o Agape love is centered in choices of the one who loves, not qualities of the one loved
- read Mt 5:43-44 – agape love is not dependent on the worth of the one who is loved

Matthew 5:43-45

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

- o it's not reserved for those who deserve it like God, our friends, our family
 - o biblical love is even for those, like our enemies, who hurt us and ridicule us
 - o not based on the worth of the one loved but on a choice we make to love even those who are unworthy of it
- John 15:13 – The pinnacle of agape love is to die for the good of the one loved

John 15:13

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

- o Do you see how opposite that is from society's definition of love?
 - o Agape love does not seek its own happiness or satisfaction...
 - o willing to sacrifice all happiness... even life itself for the one loved
 - o Agape love is not self-*satisfying*, it is self-*sacrificing*
- **So now for a biblical definition of agape love...**
 - **= the choice to value someone so highly that you sacrifice for their good**
 - o It's a choice that leads you to sacrifice your rights, desires, comfort, possessions – to bless the one you love

- **Just so we're absolutely clear: Biblical love is not a feeling... though feelings will often follow**
- **Biblical love is a CHOICE to sacrifice for the good of the one loved**
 - o Important to clarify because there will be days when you don't feel affection or desire towards the person you claim to love
 - Feelings fluctuate – people will tick you off & you won't *feel* love towards them
 - that's ok, because that's not the essence of biblical love – it's not about the feelings
 - o It's based on the choice to sacrifice self for others... even on days when that other person isn't worthy of your love
 - o Think about how God loves us – are there any days when we are worthy of His love? No! We're never worthy of is... yet He chooses to love us anyways
 - o read Rom 5:8 – Jesus chose to die for us when we deserved punishment, not love
 - o That is what true love looks like: choice to sacrifice self for the good of the one loved
 - o Now unlike Jesus most of us won't be called upon to literally die for those we love...
- **So get practical: what should agape love look like in our lives? A: it's all about GIVING**
 - o I'm not talking about giving money although that may be part of it
 - o I'm talking about giving yourself to those you claim to love
 - o To love God means you give yourself to God – you lay all of yourself, your time, skills, desires, money, possessions... all of it at His feet for His disposal
 - o To love your spouse means you give yourself to him or her. You give your time and energy to serve them and care for them. You give up your rights and your desires to lift up their rights and desires.
 - o To love others – here in the church and in the community – is to give our time and our treasure to bless them and care for them
 - o The measure of our love is the amount we give of ourselves to bless others
 - o To love is to give
- **God wants us to grow in that giving, agape love... to what extent?**
 - o Like how do you know when you've become loving enough?
 - o Trick question! You're never done growing in love!
 - o Paul says...“abound still more and more” → they already have this love to large extent
 - o but he desires God to continue to grow and expand their love
 - o point: there is not a level of love that God is content with in our lives
- **His life-long goal for you is to keep expanding your capacity for love**
- **But, He wants out love to grow...**

2) ...guided by knowledge and discernment

- Just as with love, we need start by defining these words
- **“Knowledge” – *epignosis* – word Paul uses 15 times in the New Testament**
 - o not general knowledge of math or accounting... always refers to the knowledge of ultimate reality—our knowledge of God, His Word, His world
 - o but it's a word that goes beyond mere factual knowledge
 - o = understanding something through experience
 - o you've lived it; you've seen it in action – difference between knowing about your spouse and actually knowing your spouse!
- **Paul adds a second, related term “discernment”**
 - o explained in first half of v10: “so you may be able to approve the things that are excellent”
 - o = ability to distinguish between that which is excellent and that which is not
 - you can discern between what is good and bad
 - you can even discern between what is good from what is best
- **Combine knowledge and discernment and you get WISDOM**
 - o not only do you know God and His ways, but you understand how to apply that knowledge to the choices you make in daily life

- wisdom = knowledge correctly applied to life
- In the context of loving others, it means the ability to make good choices for the benefit of the ones you love
- your wisdom is guiding your love so that you consistently do that which is best for the people you claim to love

That's what God wants for you: growth in love guided by wisdom – you must have both

- **Love-guided-by-wisdom is a powerful force for good in the world – like a mighty river**
 - that waters the land and gives life to plants, animals, and people
- **If you have love, but not wisdom, it's like you took the banks away from that mighty river. What do you get? A flood! It destroys the land and crops and animals and people.**
 - You must have strong banks to guide the river – that's wisdom guiding our love
 - **Means: if we see someone we love choosing something that is not best for them, wisdom compels us to speak up**
 - Now our society does not agree! In America, today, to love someone means that you must accept what they want as good. If you don't accept their choice, then you're intolerant, and that's the opposite of love.
 - You see this on both sides of every debate.
 - The side that loves guns assumes anyone who doesn't is their enemy – you can't love me and disagree with me on this
 - The side that hates guns assumes the same thing – you're with me on this or against me
 - You see this in morality issues. If a person decides they want a relationship that the Bible says is sinful... then for you to say it's sinful is intolerant and unloving because to love is to accept.
 - But that is not true! Biblical love is always guided by wisdom – it always says and does that which it believes is best for the one you love
 - That's why we parents make our children go to school even when they don't want to. I love my son, but when he tells me he's praying for snow because he doesn't want to go to school the next day, would it be loving for me to say, "Ok, buddy, whatever you want is good. If you don't want to go to school, I support that choice." No! I think at some point I'd go to jail if I never made him go to school! And it would cheat him of an education and curse him for the rest of his life.
 - We understand that principle when it comes to our kids, but we forget it when we're talking about adults. Now let me be clear: I can't make another adult do what I say – he or she is free to make their choice. I'm never going to force them or shame them into doing anything. BUT... I will out of love-guided-by-wisdom carefully speak to them when I see them choosing something that God says is harmful. Now how I say it, how often I say it, when I say it, to whom I say it... that all takes great prayer and discernment – there's no simple, single answer to that. But I can't simply accept as good something I truly believe is bad for them. That's not love.
 - Love must be guided by wisdom.
- **But if you have tons of wisdom but no love... then you're nothing but a dry ditch!**
 - Your wisdom is useless –
 - **1 Corinthians 13:2**
If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
- God will not allow us to choose between love and wisdom – you must have both
- **And you must grow in both – that's His developmental goal for your life**
- And in the rest of the prayer we read, Paul tells us why...

Why should we pursue this growth in love-guided-by-wisdom? 3 reasons...

Why Grow in Love Guided by Wisdom?

1) Fruitfulness in this life (v11a)

- “having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ”
- God wants you to grow in love guided by wisdom because as you do, your life will be filled by Jesus with more and more fruit of righteousness = meaning good deeds that bless others
- back to the river analogy
 - o when we trust in Jesus and first begin to grow in this divine love guided by wisdom
 - o like the little trickle of a stream in Research Park
 - good! waters dozens of trees, acres of grass, a couple families of ducks!
 - Jesus begins to fill our lives with the fruit of righteousness, with good deeds that bless others
 - but it’s small – just a trickle... and God wants more than a trickle for you!
 - o so gradually, year after year, He grows this river of love guided by wisdom within you till it’s the size of the Brazos River!
 - much bigger! waters hundreds of thousands of trees, millions of acres of crops, countless animals
 - o both streams are good, but the Brazos is having so much more beneficial effect on the world
- That’s what God wants for your life... to grow your capacity for love guided by wisdom so that your life is filled by Jesus with more and more good deeds that have more and more positive effects on this world

2) Reward in the next (v10b)

- “in order to be sincere and blameless until [or “on”] the day of Christ”
- I think this phrase is referring to the day we each stand before Jesus, who will judge our lives to see if we are worthy of receiving His reward
- Let me be perfectly clear: receiving reward from Jesus is NOT the same thing as getting to heaven!
 - o Getting to heaven has nothing to do with how loving or good you are
 - o Getting to heaven is only about Jesus - about Him dying for our sins and rising from the dead to earn eternal life for us
 - o You get to go to heaven simply by receiving that free gift of eternal life – all you must do is say to God, “Yes, I believe Jesus died for me and rose from the dead so I could have eternal life for free.” The moment you say yes to that gift, heaven becomes certain for you!
- But on that day you enter heaven, you will then stand before Jesus who will evaluate your deeds in this life
 - o Not for heaven or hell – that’s already decided based on faith alone
 - o He’ll judge your works to see if you have earned His reward
 - o What is His reward? We don’t know. Described as “crowns,” “honor,” “glory” ... we don’t know what it will be, we just know it will be wonderful and will be ours to enjoy forever
- But to earn that reward we must continue to grow in love guided by wisdom
 - o There is no other way to please Jesus and earn honor from Him

3) Glory to God (v11b)

- “to the glory and praise of God”
- The ultimate reason to grow in love guided by wisdom is that it draws the world to Jesus to the glory and praise of God
- Our love points people to Jesus so that they come to know and follow Him and worship Him
- Love is our most powerful witness for Jesus

John 13:35

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- Again, not as the world loves... as God loves – love defined by giving for the good of others – that draws people to Jesus better anything else we say or do

What Paul is doing in the last 2 verses of this passage: showing us that growing in love guided by wisdom is worth the effort and sacrifice it will require

- It's exactly as Maslow discovered: your growth in what matters most will be the most satisfying thing you can do in this life – it's worth the effort

So how do we grow in love-guided-by-wisdom?

- Paul doesn't give us a list of things to do... step 1,2,3 to grow love
 - o No – this God-like love is something only God can grow in your life
- So follow Paul's example and PRAY FOR IT!
 - o Ask God to create this growth in your life and in the lives of others
 - o Do pray for healing, success, and relief from pain – those are good things
 - o But focus your prayer on what's best / what's most important – growing in love
- Let that be the center of your prayers for yourself, your kids, your friends

End with time of private prayer

- *pray for yourself to grow*
- *pray for your family to grow – your parents, siblings, spouse, kids, relatives – pray by name*
- *pray for friends, classmates, roommates to grow – pray by name*
- *pray for our whole church to grow in this love*