

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

For This Reason I Pray

PART

3

TITLE

That Our Love Might Abound

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 1:3-11



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Good morning Providence. It's so good to see you this morning. My name is Daniel Savage. I'm one of the pastors here and as always, it's a joy to be able to open the Word with you.

If you have a Bible, you can turn to Philippians 1. That's where we'll be this morning looking at the first part of the Book of Philippians, which is a letter that Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. Like a lot of his letters it's going to begin this morning with a lot of personal greeting, and a lot of personal descriptions of their relationship. The Philippians love for Paul, his love for them, their partnership in the Gospel. He is going to talk about in verses 9-11, which is where we'll spend most of our time talking about this prayer that he is praying for them. There's going to be a lot going on when we look at these horizontal relationships, the relationship between Paul and the Philippians.

But when we study the Bible we always want to ask the question, what is it revealing about God? What is God doing in these relationships? What activity of His is being revealed? Because that's why it is written. The Bible is a revelation of God. And so even when it's talking about people and their relationships, it's revealing something about Him.

Now we're in the middle of a series called, For This Reason I Pray, where we're looking at some of these prayers that are recorded in the New Testament and thinking about what were they praying for and our desires that would shape and direct our prayers as God's people. As we think about what these inspired writers were praying for, we want that to shape how we are praying.

And this morning we'll be praying, or we'll be looking at Paul's prayer where he was praying that our love would abound. That's what we're thinking about this morning, that our love would abound. And really we'll start in verse three and we'll go through verse 11 and I hope to see together and make it clear that really the kind of the driving force or the active agent in everything that's going on in this passage of Philippians 1 is the love of God. That it's the love of God that is working in the Philippians. It's the love of God that is creating this love that they have for one another. It's the love of God that is transforming them and ultimately will finish the work that God has started in them.

Let me say a prayer one more time and ask God to help us as we approach His Word this morning. So pray with me if you would.

Heavenly Father, would you reveal yourself to us this morning through your Word? Would you promise to reveal truth to us, to lead us into all truth? And I pray that you would do that this morning. As we read your Word and try to understand it, God, would you reveal yourself? Speak clearly to us, I pray. And as Jesus is lifted high, I pray that He would draw us all to Himself. Would you work in this miraculous way among us this morning, I pray in Jesus name, amen.

Philippians 1 starting in verse three. It says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every

prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that He began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It's 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, in confirmation of the Gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you 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."

If you're taking notes this morning, the first thing that I want you to write down is that we should rest in God's love that will keep us until the end. Rest in God's love that will keep us until the end. Look back at verse three where Paul begins by expressing his thanksgiving and joy for the people in Philippi. As he's remembering them, he's filled with thanksgiving. He says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now."

Now remember when Paul is writing this like so many of his letters, he is writing them from prison. He's writing them in the midst of difficult circumstances. He's going to mention that in the next couple of verses, but it's worth stopping to consider from the very beginning that we can be filled with thanksgiving and have great joy even in the midst of suffering, especially when we are praying. You may be facing difficult circumstances, you may be facing hardship, but in prayer we can still be filled with thanksgiving and joy because of who God is.

He gets to verse six, and Paul describes the confidence that he has in God's plan for the church in Philippi. He says, "And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ." So God started a good work in them. He's referring to the work of their salvation. God began a miraculous work which Jesus says in John is a new birth. And Paul describes this work in Ephesians 2 as bringing someone from death to life. We're dead in transgressions and sins and we're made alive by the work of God.

And so God started this work and Paul is sure that He will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. So the day of Jesus Christ is the day of Christ's return or the last day, the day of judgment. Before the final day or the final hour, God will complete His work. In other words, He won't be late. He will complete what He started, and He will do it on time.

And what will that look like? What will this completed work be like? Well, he's going to describe it in these verses, but basically it means that we will be made fully ready to see Jesus. We will be sanctified, cleansed, made holy, filled with the fruit of righteousness.

Now one important thing for us to remember or to notice here is that God is the one who started this work in us and He is the one who is going to be faithful to complete it. And why is that so important to notice? Because if you haven't figured it out already, you will at some point find out that you don't have the resources to finish the work of remaining faithful to God and growing in the fruit of righteousness. You don't have the internal resources to finish this work that God has started in you.

Unfortunately, you and I are easily led astray, quickly discouraged and very unreliable. And like Paul says in the Book of Romans 7, "We don't do what we want to do and we do what we don't want to do." Why? Because there are two natures that work in us. Our sin nature still longs for the things of the world, but the spirit in us longs for righteousness, making us wildly unpredictable. The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that the heart is deceitful above all things. You can't even trust your own heart, which is why Philippians 1:6 has been a favorite verse for Christians for centuries, "And I am sure of this," it says, "That He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it at the day of Jesus Christ."

Charles Spurgeon was a famous preacher in London in the 1800s and there's a story about him that he was once asked by another minister whether he believed in the final perseverance of the saints. Well he said, "I do not know much about that, but I firmly believe in the final perseverance of God. That where He has begun a good work, He will carry it on until it is complete." And that is the point. If the miracle of a changed heart and faithfulness to the end depends on us, then we are all in trouble.

But if it depends upon God who created and sustained the heavens and the earth, is all knowing and has all power, is tender in mercy and whose very nature and character are loving and faithful than we can with Paul, have confidence that God will finish what He has started. "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion." So if you are discouraged, or feel defeated, or weak, or frustrated by your own failures, remember that it is God who started a work in you, and He with all of His power and goodness will be faithful to complete it.

And so we can pray with joy even in difficult circumstances just like Paul, because our confidence is not in ourselves or in our circumstances, but our confidence is in the one who will finish the work. Because we know that God will use all things for our good because we are part of something that is eternal. We're partners with God and with each other in the advance of the Good News, that all people can be reconciled to God. And so the first point of application this morning is let's pray with joy and confidence as we rest in God's persevering love. Let's pray with joy and confidence as we rest in God's persevering love. God's love allows us to rest in the confidence that He will complete His work. And the second response that we should have to God's love for us that you can write down if you're taking notes, is that we can rejoice that God's love transforms us. Rejoice that God's love transforms us. Look with me at verses seven and eight. It says, "It's right for me to feel this way about you all," Paul talking about the way he feels about the Philippians. "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. For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

Paul says it's right for him to feel this way about them. It's right for him to have this confidence in God's work in their lives. Why? Because he's seen that they are partakers with him of grace. In other words, he has seen the beginning of God's work in their lives. He has seen the fruit that is beginning to show up because God is already at work. He's confident that God will complete the work because he's confident that God has started a work in them.

They're showing this evidence of God's grace in their lives. And so if God has obviously started a work, then He will finish it. And this evidence that Paul is seeing is their sacrifice to support him in his ministry, their partnership in the Gospel. He's going to mention in chapter four that the Philippians were a constant support to him. That they were always looking after him. In fact, they'll send Epaphroditus to go and find Paul to send a gift to him to try to support him in his imprisonment.

He even says in chapter four verse 14 that they shared in his affliction. And so he is noticing and pointing out in the Philippians that they are willing to suffer for the Gospel. And Paul's point is that all of this is evidence of God's work in their lives. People don't love the Gospel and show a willingness to suffer for it without God working in their hearts. That's not a natural thing. Paul is commending them and expressing his confidence that the love of God is already at work in them. They have experienced God's love in Jesus Christ in a way that has already begun to change their lives so much so that Paul can see it.

This is why I say that our response can be to rejoice that God's love transforms us. That's what Paul is noticing. He's looking at and highlighting how God's love has already begun to change the Philippians. God's love produces the fruit of change. It makes selfish people selfless. It makes greedy people generous, it makes fearful people filled with faith. When we experience the love of God, it gives us patience, compassion, hope, and joy. So if we're going to rejoice in this truth, then we should consider how God is already at work in us, and how we have seen Him at work in the lives of people around us.

So consider, how has God been changing you? Now, the change that God works in our hearts is usually slow. You shouldn't try to compare yourself to what you were like yesterday to find the changes that God is working in you. Instead, you should compare yourself to a few years ago. As you look back and think about your own story and God's grace in your life, how has your heart changed? Your desires? How have you grown? What sins are you experiencing more victory over? And if you can look back and see growth in these areas, you can be confident that God is at work within you. Because these aren't changes that we work in ourselves, these are changes that God works in us. Clear evidence of God's Spirit at work within you.

So the second point of application, let's look for evidence of God's work in our lives, and rejoice in His faithfulness to us. Now, God's love here I think is the active agent. It's creating these relationships that they're enjoying. It's creating this desire to sacrifice for the Gospel. It's transforming them and changing them. It's giving them this confidence that they can rest in God's love.

And so if God's love is what is transforming us, then how do we get more of it? God can't love you anymore than He does right now. His love for you is perfect and full, but you can't experience more of His love. You can know His love and enjoy His love more, which will increase your love, which is exactly what Paul is going to pray for the Philippians. God's love allows us to rest in His work, rejoice in the transformation it brings.

And finally the last point this morning is that it invites us to ask God that our love would abound, ask God that our love would abound. I'm taking that directly from Paul's prayer in verses nine through 11, which is where we'll spend the majority of our time. He's telling us here that he's praying for the Philippians and he's telling us what he's praying for.

Look at verse nine. "It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment so that you 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." So what he's asking for is that their love would abound more and more. He wants their love to increase. Now I think upon first hearing that it sounds strange that we would be asking God to grow our love or give us more love, but that fits perfectly with what we already know about God as the source of all love.

The apostle John says in his letter, 1 John 4:7-10, he says, "Beloved, let us love one another. For love is from God. And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love, does not know God because God is love. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. And this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Love is from God. God is love.

What does that mean exactly? It means that love isn't just one of God's characteristics. He isn't just a loving God, but that it is His very nature. He is the wellspring or source of all love. And the clearest display of love is that God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In other words, the greatest display of love in the world is the Gospel. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone laid down his life for his friends." God who is love gave the greatest picture of love when He sent His Son to lay down His life for us. This is the Gospel, which simply means good news. This is the good news.

Why do we need this good news? Well, our consciences have made it clear to us that we have fallen short of what God has required. Romans 1 says that we can look around at all that has been made and it is clear to each one of us that there is a creator, and He has put a law in our hearts that says we have fallen short of what He has demanded of us. And this is called sin. And this is why the good news is needed. Because you and I are in a hopeless state apart from God's help. The good news is that God sent His Son to rescue us from our sins. Jesus lived the life that we could not live. He was sinless and righteous in every way. He lived a life that was pleasing to God the Father.

And then He died the death that we deserve to die. He died on a cross, a horrible and shameful death because

He died in our place and satisfied the judgment of God. He died in our place to set us free. And on the third day after His crucifixion, He was raised from the dead as a display of His victory over sin and death. And now He invites us to put our trust in His finished work on our behalf. If you put your faith in Jesus and His work, His life and death and resurrection, you'll be forgiven of your sins, and restored in relationship with God. This is the Gospel, this is the good news. John tells us it's the manifestation of the love of God. It is the clearest display of God's love that has ever been seen.

Now if you come every week, you're here regularly, you hear something like that every week at Providence. And maybe you have asked, "Why do we talk about that one thing so often here? Why is that so important? Why are we always talking about the Gospel?" And the reason that we are always talking about the Gospel is because it is God's power at work in the world. Jesus said, "I've come to make all things new." And He did that through His life, death and resurrection. It was the Gospel that rescues us from sin. It's the Gospel that continues to change us and it's the Gospel that will finish the work that God has started. God is working through this display of love in the world and in us.

That's why Paul is praying that their love would abound more and more, because what we need more of is this experience of the love of God. And when we try to change, when we try to do these things that Paul is talking about, when he talks about the fruit of this love in our lives, it's going to be purity, and blamelessness, and righteousness. So what we often do is we often divorce God's love and the Gospel, and these attempts to grow in purity, and righteousness, and blamelessness. When we do that, we just become very religious. We try to follow all of the rules. We try to do everything right because that's what we're supposed to do.

But what Paul is doing is he's very intentionally connecting these things. That it is the love of God and the experience of that love which will produce a fruit in us that looks like purity, blamelessness, righteousness. We can follow Paul's logic right through the prayer. He says that, "He wants their love to abound more and more with knowledge, in all discernment." He's talking about a spiritual knowledge, all discernment, meaning they'll know what to love. See, our hearts are filled with loves. We love all kinds of things. They're just mostly the wrong things. And so he's saying, "Let their love abound more and more and let it be guided by knowledge and discernment so that they might love the right things."

Another way to think about it would be to say, "That they would know and understand God's heart. And this knowledge would produce a discernment so that their love would be pointed at the right things." And he's asking that their love would grow towards the things that God loves, which is going to lead to verse 10, "So that they may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ." As our love grows with knowledge and discernment, we will more and more love the things that God says are good, which will lead to purity on the inside, in our hearts, and minds and blamelessness on the outside in our actions. Our actions will be righteous, which is what it says in verse 11, "Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ."

All of this is coming about because of a growing understanding of the love of God. “And this is love,” John says, “Not that we have loved God, but that He loved us, and gave His Son as a propitiation for our sins.” In other words, the love that we need to grow in familiarity with, is God’s love for us. It’s the Gospel. And growing in our understanding of this good news of what God has done for us, it will begin to transform our hearts and change what we love.

Now here’s the danger. When we talk about this every week, it can become cold and distant. When we talk about the Gospel week in and week out, it’s tempting for us to just hear it as this kind of abstract reality like, “Oh yeah, I know about that. I know that Gospel. I know those facts already,” and we pass on. “Yeah, yeah. Get to the part I don’t know. Teach me something new.” And what we need to be reminded of is that we need this Gospel not just to be forgiven of our sins and to enter into the Kingdom, but to continue to grow. It is the power for change in our lives.

And so when our hearts grow cold to it should be like a warning light going off in our minds. I need to do some adjustment. I need to stop and remember that this Gospel isn’t old news. It’s not something that got me in and now I’m moving on to bigger and better things. It’s something that I need every day. I was dead in transgressions and sins. I was hopeless apart from the rescue of Jesus Christ. This good news should strike our hearts.

And when our hearts grow cold to it, we should ask God for help. “Give me a love that abounds more and more, restore to me the joy of my salvation. Help me to remember that I needed this and will be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.” All of this will be to the glory and praise of God. This is God’s work. He gets all the credit from beginning to end. He is the one who rescues us. He’s the one who gives us a new heart. He’s the one who fills us with love for what is good and right and moves us towards those things more and more. He started a good work in us and He is faithfully completing it, all to the praise of His glorious might. And this is what Paul is praying as he prays to the church in Philippi.”God, finish the work He started in them. Let that love in them abound more and more, grow their hearts towards what is good and right, and let it produce in them a purity, and blamelessness, and the fruit of righteousness.” What I want us to do is to use Paul’s prayer as a guide for our own prayers, that we would be pleading with God for a love that is abounding more and more. And that’s guided by knowledge and discernment that would lead us to purity and righteousness. This is the completed work of God, a heart that is transformed to the point that it no longer loves the things of this world or sin, but loves God, and loves the things that God says are good. What we need is a new heart filled with new affections.

Puritans used to talk about affections all the time. They would talk about the affections of the heart, these things that our hearts love. And they were always examining what are the affections of our hearts? What is it that we are loving and running after? One of the most influential things I’ve ever read was a sermon by Thomas Chalmers, who was a Puritan. He was a pastor in the early 1800s. And the title of the sermon is *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection, The Explosive Power of a New Affection*. You can find the PDF online,

you can find it for free. It's 11 pages long and it'll take you four hours to read it, but it is worth every minute that you invest.

It's a sermon that he preached on 1 John 2:15 which says, "Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Thomas Chalmers makes this argument that the heart was engineered, it was designed, it was created to love, to have affections, to have passions, to have desires. And he says, "If you try to obey this verse, do not love the world or the things in the world by just convincing yourself to not love the world anymore, you'll fail every time." He said, "Because if you convince yourself that one day to not love the things of the world and don't give yourself something else to love, you'll wake up the next morning and you'll run right back to that old love because your heart must pursue something." This is the way God made us to be.

And so he says, "The way that we obey this verse is not by convincing ourselves not to love the world anymore, but it's by a new affection. And it's the explosive power, the power of a new affection to expel an old one." A new love pushes out an old love. He gives an illustration, which I think is really helpful. He talks about young men and how young men love to sleep. If you've ever been around young men, or if you've ever been one, you know that young men love to sleep.

When I was in college, my roommates and I was almost like a competition who could sleep the latest on Saturday. And if we didn't have anything to do, we could sleep a really, really long time. There's a proverb that I always think about, about the sluggard. There's something about how he turns in his bed like a door turns on its hinges or something like that. And we would just, you'd wake up and you'd realize you have nothing to do, and so you roll over and go back to sleep. It was a game we played.

And so Thomas Chalmers talks about how young men love to sleep and they do it all the time. But he says, "As men get older, they stop sleeping so much. You don't find them sleeping in the way that they used to." And he says, "It's not because they don't love sleep." No one ever stopped loving sleep. No one ever said, "You know what? I'm done with sleep. I'm not going to do that anymore. It's not really my thing anymore. I'm moving on." And he says they stopped doing it because they started loving something else more.

They started loving their work, or their success, or money, or their family, or their hobbies. There's something, there's some new love, some new affection that pushed out that old affection and they started to wake up earlier and earlier. His argument is that our hearts are designed to work this way. You're never going to convince yourself to stop loving the things of the world. What you need is to be introduced to something far better to love.

He argues that the only thing that can expel these old loves of the world is the love of God Himself. When we come to know that love, a love that was displayed, manifested in the Gospel, a love of a God who came and sent His Son to rescue us when we were still yet His enemies, Jesus died for us.

When we become more intimate with that love, when we know it more and more and enjoy it more and more, we will more and more move away from the things of the world. Because as my heart is satisfied in God, and I enjoy Him, I no longer want to participate in anything that might move me away from Him. It's a new love that pushes out an old love. And that's exactly what Paul is praying for here. "May their love abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment." In other words, "May they love the right things. And may they love them so much that it would begin to produce in them the fruit of purity, and blamelessness, and righteousness."

He's asking God to do this in them. That's an important thing for us to remember as we close. This is not a work you can do on your own. "Oh, if I just study the Gospel hard enough, if I remind myself of it enough times a day, if I memorize these verses, surely that will work." No, it's a work that God must do in your heart, which is why Paul is giving us this example. Ask the Lord for it. It's His work. He started it. Ask Him to complete it. Ask Him to complete it in your life and ask Him to complete it in the lives of those around you. If you're struggling with sin, stop trying to convince yourself not to love that sin anymore, and give your heart something better to love.

If you're not a Christian here today, you never experienced the soul satisfying love of God, then I plead with you to put your trust in Christ. He lived the life that you could not live, died the death you deserve to die so that you could be forgiven. Put your trust in Him.

If you are a Christian, let me leave you with these last few applications.

One, let's ask God that our love may abound. Let's ask God that our love may abound. Let's ask God to give us a great love for Him and for others. And let's use Paul's prayer as a helpful guide to pray for one another. And before I pray to close, let me just give you three practical things you can do this week to engage in prayer. One, you can pick up the prayer guide that's out in the lobby, 21 Days of Prayer. We're two thirds of the way through it. Even if you haven't done it yet, I encourage you to jump in and start with us. You can get the guide out there or you can find it online on the website. But join us in praying. What we're doing is praying through these prayers, trying to use these prayers to prompt us as we pray for God's work in our lives and in the world around us.

Second, we have a prayer ministry at Providence. It is a vibrant and active ministry where we're regularly interceding for each other, for the church and for the world. I want to invite you to an interest meeting next Sunday after church, after the 11 o'clock service in Prisms, which is right out these doors, if you go out the doors, it's to my left. Prisms will meet there. It'll be a short meeting where we just go over what is the prayer ministry here at Providence and how can you be involved in it?

And then third and finally, next Sunday night, we're going to conclude our 21 Days of Prayer with a really

sweet night that I want you all to come to on October 30th, next Sunday night. We'll have dinner before, and then we're going to have a prayer and worship night. And you have to sign up online. Please sign up online so that we know how much food to get. Three ways this week to move forward in prayer. Let me say a prayer for you and then we'll sing.

Heavenly Father, thank you for hearing our prayers. Thank you for the manifestation of your love in the Gospel. Thank you for rescuing us from our sins. God, would you help us not to grow cold to these realities? Would you help us to remember each day what you have done for us? I pray that our love would abound with knowledge and all discernment. I pray that you would grow this love in us that would move us towards the things that you love.

I pray that as our understanding of and appreciation for the Gospel increases that we would grow. This is a work that we cannot do in ourselves. We need your help. We need you to work in us. So God, would you pour out your grace? Would you give us faith to believe your promises? Would you stir in us a love that would abound? Transform us, keep us, hold us fast.

Help us to be a praying people that cry out day and night for you to give justice. Help us to intercede for one another. Help us to intercede for the world around us. Give us a heart for the nations. Help us God, we need you and we believe that you hear us. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Let's stand. Let's sing and celebrate.



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