

## STUDY GUIDE

**PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**PHILIPPIANS: CITIZENS OF HEAVEN LIVING ON EARTH**  
**PRAYING FOR OTHERS**  
**PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11**  
**09/03/2017**



### MAIN POINT

Paul's prayer for the Philippians' growth in love and quality of character instructs us in praying for ourselves and for others.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What do you pray for your family and closest friends? How do you pray for them when you don't know what to pray about?**

**What do you ask others to pray for you when you seem to have no crisis or health issue?**

The apostle Paul understood that sometimes we do not know how to pray. He assured the believers in Rome that, in such times, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, interpreting our hearts and spirits to the Father (Rom. 8:26-27). But Paul never meant we should always be without understanding as to how to pray. His own prayers reveal a personal clarity regarding what to pray for the churches to which he wrote. Those same prayers can instruct us in how we can pray for ourselves and for others as well.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

#### **HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 1:9.**

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Paul expressed thanksgiving to God for the Philippian believers and communicated to those believers his personal affection for them (Phil. 1:3-8). Beginning with verse 9, he turned his attention to praying for his brothers and sisters in the Philippian church. Paul interceded for the believers on two fronts. First, he prayed that their "love [would] keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment." Paul did not chide them for not loving—indeed, the church had faithfully demonstrated its love for Paul (see 4:10-18)—but prayed for them to have even greater love.

**Realizing Paul spoke of self-sacrificing love like Jesus demonstrated, what would it look like for such love to "keep on growing"?**

Specifically, Paul prayed the believers' love would mature "in knowledge and every kind of discernment." The fact that Paul did not identify a specific person, event, or situation as the object of this love, knowledge, and discernment indicates he was not addressing a singular circumstance that needed fixing. Instead, Paul's prayer was for an ongoing, general growth to be characteristic of their lives.

**What is the relationship between love and “knowledge” and “discernment”? How is love without either knowledge or discernment incomplete?**

**The Greek word Paul used for knowledge refers to the knowing that is gained by life experience, not a mere academic or mental learning of facts. Why would Paul have been more concerned that believers grow in their experiential knowledge of love rather than an intellectual or academic understanding of it?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 1:10A.**

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The first part of verse 10 states the purpose or result Paul sought by his prayer for an ever-growing love on the part of the Philippian believers. The meaning of the Greek word translated “approve” means to test something by trial. It was used to describe the process of testing gold or silver to verify that they were authentic.

**Why must believers be able to test or “approve” the worthiness or superiority of one claim, need, or course of action as opposed to another?**

**How have you increased in your capacity to live more Christlike as your ability to “approve the things that are superior” has grown with your walk with Christ?**

Paul’s prayer for a growing love with increased knowledge and moral insight on the part of the Philippian Christians was accompanied by the expectation that they would likewise be able to see the best way to live in light of the challenges and opportunities around them.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 1:10B-11A.**

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Many English versions treat these verses as a continuation of Paul’s first petition (that the Philippians’ love might keep on growing), but when he wrote the letter to this beloved church, he formulated this as a second request. Specifically, Paul prayed for the character of these early believers. He prayed that they would be “pure and blameless” and “filled with the fruit of righteousness.” As with verse 9, Paul was not implying a deficit on the part of the Philippians, but reflecting the ongoing nature of Christian character and conduct.

**What connection do you see between growing love and Paul’s prayer for the purity, blamelessness, and fruitfulness of the Philippian church?**

**What significance do you see in Paul’s prayer for purity and blamelessness “in the day of Christ”?**

The term Paul used for “pure” is a compound word made up of the Greek noun for “sun” and the verb for “to judge.” It suggests the process of holding something up to the light of the sun for the purpose of judging or inspecting it. Some things can appear unblemished until examined in the glow of the sun or a bright light, at which point one often discovers previously unseen flaws. Paul’s prayer was not for the appearance of purity, but for a true purity that would withstand the closest scrutiny under the discerning inspection of Jesus.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 1:11B.**

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As with his first petition, Paul included the result he desired from his prayer—“the glory and praise of God.” Our efforts toward purity, toward blamelessness and being beyond reproach (Titus 2:8), and toward fruitfulness are not to be for our own reputation or recognition, but to give honor and praise to God.

**How can we determine whether our attempts to hone our character are for our own honor or for His?**

If our character development efforts produce “good” results, what difference does it make why we undertake them? Is it good enough that we are pure, blameless, and fruitful?

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How does your love for other believers need to grow? What can you do to facilitate that growth?**

**“Pure,” “blameless,” and “filled with the fruit of righteousness”—which of these is the greatest need in your life right now? Why do you conclude that?**

**Paul did not tie “the glory and praise of God” to an event (i.e. Sunday morning worship) but to the day-in-and-day-out character of believers. On this basis, what would it require of you to glorify and praise God more than you currently do?**

## PRAY

Challenge group participants to thank God that He is concerned both for their ongoing growth in love and for the quality of their character. Urge them to pray Philippians 1:9-11 first for themselves, then for another believer whom God lays on their hearts.

## COMMENTARY

### PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

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1:9. Having expressed his love for the Philippians, Paul shares his prayer for their pursuit of Christian growth. Having described their love (v. 7), he prays for it to abound. Love is a primary characteristic of Christlikeness. Yet love is more than mere emotion. Love can increase in knowledge and depth of insight. Knowledge is spiritual wisdom found in Scripture. Insight is application of this spiritual wisdom to practical living. Christian love must be rooted in wisdom from God’s Word if we are to love both God and man in greater ways.

1:9a Some confusion always exists in discussing love. It is at the same time the universal ideal to which all should aspire and the most personal and existential of all expressions. The definition of love is addressed in this part of v. 9. Paul used the word *agape*. The word predominates in Scripture as the expression of love. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish *agape* from *phileo* because the two occur frequently in Scripture with seemingly interchangeable meaning. Nevertheless, *phileo* does contain an element of mutuality not found in *agape*. It is a satisfying interaction with others.

What is clear is that for Paul *agape* emphasized the self-sacrificial love of Christ. It is a selfless action to benefit someone else. The model for this love is Christ, who gave himself for the sins of the world. As Paul prayed for the readers’ love to abound, he prayed for their Christlike attitude of self-sacrifice to continue as it had been demonstrated earlier in their giving. The sacrificial nature of the love is further stressed in that there is no object for the love; it is a characteristic of the “lover” regardless of the object.<sup>33</sup> Jesus taught that aspect in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37).

1:9b The prayerful exhortation to love came with instructions about how to implement it. The words “knowledge and depth of insight” provide the twofold environment in which love may grow. They are, in fact, the most basic elements which foster love.<sup>38</sup> The first aspect of the environment for growing love is knowledge. The Greek word for “knowledge” (*epignosis*) is difficult to translate into acceptable English. The root word is *gnosis*, and the preposition *epi* (“upon”) is prefixed to it. Both parts of the compound need explanation.

The basic word used here (*gnosis*) contains a slight contrast with its synonyms. Most often it is compared or contrasted with the common Greek term for “knowledge” (*oida*). This latter term generally signifies an intellectual knowledge (the product of the mind). It may convey the idea of a complete knowledge because the other terms are not well suited to

the idea of completion. In contrast, *gnosis* generally conveys the idea of an experiential knowledge (the product of experiencing by living). It easily lends itself to expressing relationships since they come from experiences. Further, since experiences provide the process of learning, *gnosis* often stresses the process of knowing, rather than the outcome. Here Paul used the term in its full sense of real, personal knowing. It is not the product of deductive reasoning and, therefore, intellectual (*oida*). Nevertheless, it is not fully relational, indicating only relationships with persons. Paul wanted them to have a personal knowledge which, as he stated later in this prayer, would surface in practical ways as well. Paul added judgment, the moral environment, to knowledge. The term “depth of insight” occurs only here in the New Testament, although a form of the root word occurs in Heb 5:14. It conveys the sense of moral discretion. Thus morality affects the growth of love. Like “love,” the terms “knowledge” and “insight” have no expressed objects. They speak to broad, general concerns. The comprehensive knowledge includes an accurate understanding of God and the world, as well as the “lover” himself. Similarly, the moral insight comes from various sources and is comprehensive in nature. It exposes the rightness and wrongness of all thoughts and actions.

1:10. Next Paul prays for discernment of what is best, which is a result of growth in godly knowledge and insight. Discernment here is the ability to discriminate, to examine or test things that differ. As we mature as Christians, our abilities to make choices should improve. We are to base our decisions on Scripture so that the best way is selected. The best way is both moral and ethical before God. When this pattern is observed, our lives are pure and blameless. These words do not mean perfection or sinlessness. They refer to our motives. Paul prays that these Christians would develop a genuine lifestyle, without hypocrisy, before God and men. As in 1:7, the day of Christ refers to the time when Christ will come for all true believers, his church. Since we do not know when this event might occur, an incentive for living a pure and blameless lifestyle is to be unashamed before Christ should he choose to come at a time when we least expect him. We are to be ready at all times to face him. Paul envisioned mature Christians who had the ability to distinguish right from wrong. He directed his prayer toward that end. The NIV correctly translates what may be taken in several ways. The word “discern” has the meaning of test by trial, and the term “best” emphasizes the result of that testing. The phrase need not stress the fact that some things are harmful and, therefore, should be avoided. It has equal application to affirming and embracing the best of good choices, and that reading fits this text better. Since this context calls for a wisdom related to life, the words suggest the ability to discern moral conduct and values so that life and energy are not misdirected. A growing love, fed by proper knowledge and moral insight, enables one to see the best way to live in light of the day of Christ. Discerning what is best develops character. A growing love provides for character development and completion. As Paul prayed, his thoughts moved to the day of accountability. He prayed that the Philippians would live in such a way that they would be without blame at that time. In this second petition, therefore, Paul saw the end of life on earth. As always, the return of the Lord and Christians’ preparation for it occupied his thoughts. Paul identified through prayer the nature of complete character, the means to it, and the purpose of it.

1:10b Two words describe Paul’s concern for the Philippians: “pure and blameless.” Strictly defined these words convey two slightly different ideas. “Pure” (*eilikrins*) occurs only one other time in the New Testament (2 Pet 3:1), although other words with the same root occur (i.e., 1 Cor 5:8). The most common etymology of the term suggests that it comes from the two words “sun” (*helios*) and “to judge” (*krin*) and that the word meant to hold up to sunlight for inspection. “Blameless” (*aproskoi*) also occurs rarely in the New Testament. The term may have an active meaning (to

cause blame) or a passive one (to be free from blame). The decision is a difficult one since both have a precedent (cf. Acts 24:16; 1 Cor 10:32). The text, however, follows with a reference to the “fruit of righteousness,” a term which implies character, and thus it favors the passive sense. Paul hoped they would have a blameless life.

1:11. The fruit of righteousness is Christian character or moral qualities that glorify God. Paul described these inner characteristics in Galatians 5:22-23 as the fruit of the Spirit. Our righteousness comes through our faith in Christ. As he transforms our lives, we become more like him. A relationship with Christ is necessary to achieve fruit in the Christian life. Therefore, since God is at work in us, the glory and praise belong not to us but to God.

1:11b Paul concluded this prayer with a reference to God’s glory. The day of Christ characterized Paul’s thoughts; the glory of God motivated Paul’s actions. He saw the entire scope of salvation as an outworking of God’s grace and as a contribution to God’s glory. The chief end of persons was the glory of God. He reminded the Philippians of their ultimate calling, to reflect God’s character in their lives. He explained the reason for their careful living: the glory of God in their lives. With this prayer for God’s glory, Paul ended the first section of the epistle.