

Title: Thank God for the Family of God
Date: 12/15/24
Subject: give thanks to God for the people of God
Scripture: Philippians 1:3 - 11

Read Philippians 1:3 - 8

--For whom to give thanks

Paul and Silas visited Philippi on their second mission trip. It was the first time they had ventured into modern day Europe.

Who were the people they encountered? Lydia (Acts 16:11-15) was one of the women they met when they sought a place of prayer. She was a wealthy businesswoman. She was a worshiper of God, meaning she believed there was one God, followed his moral teachings, and as a Gentile, hadn't converted to Judaism. She was close, but not quite there. The Lord opened her heart to respond to the truth about Jesus dying for her sins. She and her household were saved and baptized. She called herself a believer. It wasn't just Lydia but also her family. There were likely other women from the prayer group who placed their trust in Christ.

The next person I hope became part of the church because something dramatic happened in her life. She was a slave girl who was demon possessed (Acts 16:16-18). She proclaimed that Paul and Silas were servants of the most high God. That sounds nice but she probably meant Zeus the Greek God or the devil was using her to mock Paul and Silas and get them into trouble by connecting them with the bizarre.

Finally, Paul had enough and rebuked the spirit. It left her. We aren't told anything more about the slave girl, but I'd like to think she put her trust in Jesus Christ, joined the church, had a story she could tell and just by her presence would showcase the power of Jesus.

3. The jailer (Acts 16:23-39). The slave girl's owners dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates and accused them of advocating customs unlawful for Romans to accept or practice. The crowd piled on more accusations. The magistrates caved in. Paul and Silas were severely beaten and thrown into a maximum security prison under the care of the jailer, likely a retired soldier of rank.

About midnight, Paul and Silas were singing praises to God and praying. The other prisoners couldn't help but listen due to the crowded conditions. The Lord joined Paul and Silas to make it a trio. The Lord sang bass by way of an earthquake which shook the prison's foundations. All the doors opened. Everybody's chains came loose. The head jailer woke up and decided that everyone had escaped. He would be held accountable. The only way out was to kill himself. Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We're all here!"

The jailer called for lights and rushed to Paul and Silas with one thought on his mind. He wasn't seeking an explanation for what happened. He knew it was some sort of miracle. It wasn't what he'd tell his superiors. Who cared about them at the moment? He was after something infinitely more important. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household."

The jailer put his trust in Christ as Savior. His whole family believed. All of them were baptized because of their profession of faith in Christ.

4. The brothers. (Acts 16:40). After Paul and Silas were released from prison, they went to Lydia's house where they met with "the brothers." Who were they? Relatives of Lydia? Business associates? Servants? People who'd witnessed the demon cast out of the slave girl? We don't know. What we do know is they were brothers, meaning they'd also placed their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. They were part of the family of God.

Paul had known the unique group of people for about 10 years - the wealthy businesswoman, former demon possessed slave girl, the battle hardened and scarred soldier, the brothers, some of the prisoners whether they had gotten out of prison or not and others. Paul gave thanks for the entire church - "for all of you," a phrase used in vv. 4 and 7. He was thankful for all the people who were in the family of God in Philippi.

We are to give thanks for other people who know Christ as Savior. This includes those in this church family, those outside this church family including those we hear about from other nations. The main emphasis at the moment is for the people in this body. For all of them.

The focus isn't to be on quirks and idiosyncrasies because we all have them. It's on what we have in common – chosen by God though we weren't wise by human standards, influential, of noble birth, but were the foolish, the weak, the lowly and the despised things of this world (1 Corinthians 1:26-28).

--When to give thanks

Paul gave thanks "every time I remember you." It wasn't a haphazard thing that just kind of happened out of the blue. It wasn't that he had brain fog, a bad memory which caused the infrequency which would mean that the every time he remembered wasn't very often.

Paul had in mind a deliberate calling to mind. He says he constantly remembers them, continually does so before the Lord. He considers it to be a duty, obligation and responsibility - "ought always to thank God" (2 Thessalonians 1:3). It's the right thing to do. That's not what gritted teeth, "I'm so thankful for them that bunch of"

--How to give thanks

Pray for. Prayer means care. Paul prayed for the people for whom he gave thanks. Many of his letters begin with thanking God for the people to whom he's writing followed by a prayer. You may see this in the subject heading a person inserted before v. 3 (also Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon).

Every one of his letters includes "Grace and peace to you from God our father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." He's always throwing around "grace and peace to you." Only in 1 Thessalonians is it that brief. Sometimes he uses an extended form like in Ephesians where he lists numerous spiritual blessings and then gets into his thanksgiving and prayer. In the two books to Timothy, he adds mercy.

How would we expect him to express his thankfulness for people? He could and did send letters. He couldn't pick up a phone to talk to them or send a text. We do. We can. We should use a variety of methods to give thanks for people, expressing it to them and praying to God about them.

with joy. We sprinkle in one of the keywords from Christmas – joy. Paul certainly didn't have modern celebrations of Christmas in mind with songs like *Joy to the World* when he says he was praying with joy. However, he did write a Christmas song in Philippians 2 about the Son of God coming to earth.

We are to have joy for each other.

The apostle spoke of his connection with the church. V. 7 “it's right for me to feel this way.” V. 8 “I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” Paul tightly held the Philippians in his heart and mind.

He felt the same way about other church bodies. To the people in Corinth: “I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. I have spoken to you with great frankness; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds” (2 Cor 7:3, 4). To the Thessalonian people: “For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy” (1 Thess 2:19, 20).

Considering other people this way is one way to prevent others from getting on our nerves or on our last nerve. This doesn't mean people, even the ones we love the most, won't irritate us from time to time. It happens. But we don't need to allow that to be our focus. We remember how much God loved us in spite of all the difficulties and disagreeableness we offered to him. We extend the same to others.

--why give thanks

1. They knew Christ as Savior and God was working to bring that salvation to completion. There came a point in their lives where they were saved. Their lives were altered. Not only was the course of their life changed but also their very beings in the way they lived their lives. They were now headed toward heaven because they placed their trust in Jesus Christ. God had begun to do a good work in their lives.

The continuing aspect of their salvation was that God was working in the process known as sanctification. The initial positional aspect occurs at the moment a person places their trust in Christ as Savior. God views them as being made right with himself. It continues throughout their life as the experiential or progressive aspect as people seek to live mature cleansed lives dedicated to God. It culminates in full and complete sanctification when a person gets to heaven. It's when salvation is complete and full.

Stuart Briscoe, “Sometimes I think we talk a little too glibly about Christ's work in our lives. To really believe that the Lord of heaven is at work in a tiny, little life is either arrogant nonsense or magnificent truth. The convinced Christian, of course, rules out the nonsense theory and is locked to the truth theory. But to take this lightly is to do a massive truth a grave injustice.”

The apostle and the people of the church in Philippi shared a bond. He noted in V. 7 that all of them shared God's grace with him. They were in this thing called the Christian life together. He wasn't above and superior to them. Later he encourages all of them, including himself, in the goal of “living up to what we have already attained” (3:16). He states that even as they had always obeyed, they were to continue to work out their salvation with fear and trembling because it's God who works in them to will and to do according to his good purpose (2:12, 13).

Faith is to be growing more and more and the love every one has for each other is to be increasing (2 Thessalonians 1:3,4). It isn't a select few who are to do the loving. Each is responsible.

2. Partnership in gospel V. 5

Partnership means being part of the team. It's not "apart-nership" Paul never intended that he'd be the one person who'd bring the gospel to the entire world. He knew he was limited. He knew he needed help. He needed partners.

Their partnership grew out of their concern which led to their support of Paul. They were behind the scenes. He thanked them for the way they supported him. It began in the early days of their acquaintance with the gospel (4:15,16). They were the one church that gave. They did it again and again and again. Most recently they'd sent Epaphroditus with financial gifts to Rome to take care of Paul (Philippians 2:25-30; 3:18).

They also took the stage as they shared the gospel. Paul told them they "shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life" (2:15,16). They were lights in a spiritually dark world. He told him he was glad for the sacrifice and service coming from their faith (2:17).

We give thanks for those who know Christ as Savior, are part of the family of God, which is our family if we know Jesus as Savior. We're brothers and sisters because we're fellow children of God. In one sense, it doesn't get much deeper and profound than that.

We give thanks because we serve together to help others know Christ as Savior and grow in the faith. We give thanks as the body impacts our growth to be a fully functioning disciple and we impact their growth. We give thanks as the body encourages us and we encourage them. We give thanks because others are examples of the believers to us and we're examples to them. We give thanks for others giving their time, energy, resources, prayers to be involved in ministries of the church whether they are in-house or outreaches and as we give our time, energy and resources. We give thanks for others in the family of God, warts and all, even as we hope they give thanks for us, warts and all.

I mentioned earlier that Paul's thanks often lead to prayer for the people.

Read Vv. 9-11

Love is a current possession. The good folks of the church in Philippi loved God, loved Paul, loved each other. Paul prayed that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

Love is to increase in volume, not sound level, but dimensions. In another place: "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else" (1 Thessalonians 3:12).

The first time a couple says they love each other, they mean it, at least they think they mean it. I remember someone referring to it as puppy love, but it's real to the puppy. It may seem to them that their love is as great as Mount Everest and couldn't get any bigger. The truth is love can and should grow as their relationship goes through more stages - engagement, marriage, parenting, sicknesses, job changes, dealing with in laws, through the ups and downs of life. Their love can grow higher, wider, deeper.

Love is to grow in knowledge - greater understanding and appreciation of one another. When a mechanic loves working on cars, he wants to know more about them, what makes them tick – take courses, watch videos, learn from others. When a person loves pickle ball.....

Love is to grow in insight, in what is done with knowledge.

Same is true for interactions among the people of God – more knowledge and depth of insight. Start off at a certain level of love but that love is to grow. The more we understand about each other and about ourselves, our good points and bad points and their good points and bad points and how love is greater because love isn't simply emotion.

Stuart Briscoe (again): “There is one thing that could revolutionize modern society faster than anything else: agape. If hatred was attacked by love, and antagonism was countered with love, and people started giving instead of grabbing, reaching outward rather than growing inward, building bridges instead of barriers, our world would wonder what had happened. Society would be shocked.”

Modern technology has simplified life for grandparents, especially grandmas. It used to be when they wanted pictures of their grandkids, they would haul out the camera, take a photo, wait till the whole roll is full, send in the film for developing, put the pictures in a mini photo album called their “brag book”, put it in their purse, to have at the ready in case someone asked about the grandkids. Now simply go to the gallery on the phone and scroll until you get a cramp in your finger.

People were Paul’s brag book. He adopted the heavenly outlook toward his fellow believers. In heaven, all believers will love one another. It isn’t a matter of putting up with them now and in heaven our attitude will change.

Whittier, Alaska is known as a “town under one roof” because most of the 300 residents live in one big apartment complex. The building has a grocery store, post office, church and is connected by underground tunnels to the community school. Everything residents need is in that one building so there's no need to go outside. It makes sense because winters can be brutal - winds of up to 60mph, 20 feet of snow and average temperatures of -6.

Amie, a former resident said of the experience, “Because life there was so comfortable, I often wanted to keep to myself, thinking I didn't need any one...I learned that they need me, and I need them.”

Likewise, followers of Christ need one another since we are a body, a family. We can't exist alone, but need a community as we grow to be like Jesus. Our love can abound more and more. We are able to partner with others in spreading the good news of Jesus. We can help each other grow to into what God wants us to be.