

Philippians 1 English Standard Version***Greeting***

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is 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 and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Discussion Questions

Read through all of Paul's letter to the Philippians

What is Paul's situation (both negative and positive)? What is the focus of Paul's prayer? What is one specific way Paul's prayer in Philippians 1 challenges you?

What is the connection between knowledge and love? What is the connection between love and approving what is excellent?

What does it mean to approve what is excellent? How does the excellence Paul prays for relate to your own standards and desires for excellence?

Read 'Just-Around-the-Corner-Spirituality' blog

What excuses do you make for prayerlessness or spiritual dryness? How can Paul's prayer (and the rest of the letter) to the Philippians help us overcome excuses?

How might Paul's example encourage you to endure through difficult circumstances?

Do you feel your prayers need to change in any way?

Pray

Spend time praying together, using Philippians 1 as a guide to pray. As you pray for each other continue to pray for believers you may never have met.

CCEF Blog (Mike Emlet)

Just-Around-the-Corner-Spirituality

<https://www.ccef.org/resources/blog/just-around-corner-spirituality>

Have you ever thought, “If only I didn’t have this pressing deadline, I could spend more time in prayer”? Or, “Once I recover from this illness, then I’ll be able to concentrate and study God’s Word”? Or, “If I could just line up a retreat day (or better yet, a week of vacation) then my walk with Christ could be renewed and refreshed”? Or, “If only the kids were out of diapers, I would have more time to pursue God”? Or, “If only the kids were out of the house, I would have more time to pursue God”? Or “Once I get through the whirlwind of Advent and Christmas, then I’ll be able to slow down and savor God again”?

I’ve thought that. Perhaps you have as well. You might call this phenomenon “just-around-the-corner spirituality.” That is, the idea that once you can get beyond present circumstances, your relationship with God will be able to grow deeper. If I can just get around this next corner, *then* I will be able seek after God in an undistracted and more wholehearted way. The problem is, I rarely (if ever!) round the next corner to this new and blessed world of undistracted communion with Christ! It looks like I’m stuck with *today* as the context of growth in my relationship with God.

But the writer of Psalm 118 has no problem living with today in view. He’s not plagued with just-around-the-corner spirituality; he’s not feeling stuck with today like it is merely a hump to get over to a better tomorrow. He exclaims, “This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (v.24). Easy for him to say, you might think. But this call is not uttered from a serene mountaintop retreat. The psalmist’s exhortation comes fresh from the whirlwind of battle: “Out of my distress I called on the LORD” (v. 5a); “All nations surrounded me” (v. 10a); “They surrounded me like bees; they went out like a fire among thorns” (v. 12a); “I was pushed hard, so that I was falling” (v. 13a).

In this case, the psalmist experienced situational relief from his oppressors—“the LORD answered me and set me free” (v. 5b). So is he just oriented to the Lord now because he’s turned the corner circumstantially? I doubt it. All along he has been carried by the conviction, “Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his

steadfast love endures forever” (v. 1, 29). This exclamation brackets and structures the entire psalm. This conviction drives his ongoing prayer, “Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!” *Today*—with its hardships and blessings—is the context in which the psalmist exercises his faith.

Paul says something similar in Philippians 4:11-13:

I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Do you hear what Paul is saying? The blessed and contented life is not somewhere around the corner where we can imagine living in the perfect spiritual greenhouse to nurture growth. It’s right here, right now, as we learn to experience the sufficiency of Christ’s strength for us in the midst of the good, the bad, and the ugly. It’s not automatic. Paul had to learn this, as do we.

Tish Harrison Warren, in her wonderful book, *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*, quotes Annie Dillard on the importance of today: “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” These words remind Warren that “today is the proving ground of what I believe and of whom I worship” (p. 23). Yes, today is where the action is, not the supposedly “greener grass” around the corner from today.

So, are you frustrated today? Overwhelmed? Discouraged? Wrestling with discontent? Don’t wait for things to get better. Run to Jesus today—right now. Tell him what’s going on. Remember his steadfast and enduring love. Ask for his help and strength to walk in his ways. There’s no better moment to do so. Remember—the ideal context for Christian growth is *today*. Don’t miss what God is up to this very moment in your life, even as you rightly hope for a day without mourning, tears, or pain (Revelation 21:4).