

## Study 02

### “Exponential Love”

#### Philippians 1:3-11



### Dwelling in the Word

1. Prayerfully read through Philippians 1:3-11 and ask: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? 2) What does this say about what God desires to accomplish in you? 3) How could you respond to what God says in this passage?

### Beginning the Conversation

1. Start your time by making a list of things that you are thankful for. Share your list with someone and spend time in prayer, thanking God for the people, situations, items on your list.
2. Share a story of how someone has impacted your life in a positive way by sharing the truth of the Good News with you. How is the message of the Bible still Good News in your life today?

### Digging Deeper

1. What are some of the different elements of Paul’s prayer for the Philippians? Compare this with some of Paul’s other prayers (see 1 Cor 1:4-9; 2 Cor 1:3-7; Eph 1:15-23; Col 3:3-14; 2Thess 1:11-12). Does Paul’s prayer in Philippians introduce any themes or ideas that he returns to later in the letter?
2. Paul begins with thanksgiving to God (1:3-8). What are some of the things Paul is thankful for? What are some ways you can cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving in your own life?
3. Paul prays with joy – something which is a recurring theme of the letter (see 1:25; 2:2, 29; 4:1; cf. 1Thess 1:6; Rom 14:17, 15:32; Gal 5:22). What brings Paul joy? Where does joy come from, according to Paul? How would you define joy?
4. Paul is confident that God will continue the “good work” he started in their lives and bring it to completion when Christ returns (1:6; see also 2:12-13). What is the basis of Paul’s confidence? How have you seen God at work in your life since you started following Jesus? How does recognition of the past work of God in your life (and others) help develop confidence?
5. Paul prays that the Philippians’ “love may abound more and more” or “grow exponentially” (1:9). Look up some of the following passages: Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4; 1John 3:16; Col 3:14; 1 Cor 16:14; Gal 5:6; 1Pet 4:8; 1John 4:7-8, 16, 21. What are the characteristics of *agape* love? How would you describe it?
6. Consider the sequence of Paul’s prayer: he first prays for an *agape* love that gives rise to understanding and perception (1:9), which in turn leads to discerning what is best (1:10), which leads to living blameless and righteous lives (1:11). How would this change our disposition or posture towards others? How do spiritual practices/habits fit into this process?
7. What significance do you think there is to realizing that love is the foundation or starting point for understanding, discernment, and holiness?

### Living it Out


1. Write a prayer for a good friend following Paul’s prayer model. Commit to praying it whenever God brings them to mind.
2. What are some spiritual practices that you can build into your life (with God’s help) that would cultivate some of the attitudes and postures noted in this passage (joy, thanksgiving, love)?



# Exponential Love

Philippians 1:3-11


September 15, 2024  
Pastor Tyler Williams  
Greenfield Community Church



## Paul's Paradigmatic Prayer Report

Thanksgiving (1:3-8) → Petition (1:9-11)


Filled with Joy Expressed with Confidence



## Paul's Thanksgiving

Appropriately begins and ends with gratitude and praise to God:

- "I thank my God every time I remember you..." (1:3).
- "... to the glory and praise of God" (1:11).



## Paul's Thanksgiving

Partnership/Participation (*κοινωνία, koinonia*).

- "Life Together" – having something in common, sharing life together.
- Joining/union with God and one another in Christ (2:1; 3:10; 4:15).



## Paul's Thanksgiving

Partnership "in the Gospel" (1:5).

- Partnership with one another (1:7-8); and
- Partnership with God (1:6).



## Paul's Thanksgiving

This partnership comes with a Promise:

- "He who began a good work in you [pl] will carry it on to completion..." (1:6).
- Paul's confidence has more to do with God's work *in, through, and with* them, than with them alone.

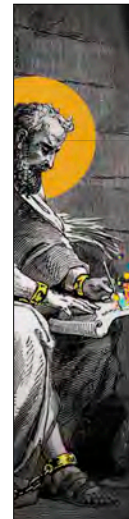


## Paul's Thanksgiving

It's not "either/or" but "both/and"

- "Therefore... continue to work out your [pl] salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you [pl] to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (2:12-13).

Not "Let go and let God," but "Let's go and let God!"



## Paul's Petition

*that* your *agape* love may grow exponentially  
in knowledge and all perception,

*so that* you may be able to discern what is most important  
may live pure and blameless lives until the  
filled with the fruit of right living

*that comes through* Jesus Christ

*and* all of this is to the glory and praise of God.

The What

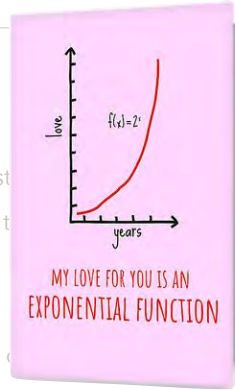
The Why

The How



## Paul's Petition - The What

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## Paul's Petition - The What

Love (*αγαπη*, *agape*).

- Not just any love, but *agape* love, love demonstrated by God and centred in Christ, selfless other-focused love.
- Recognizes that humans are primary lovers (James K.A. Smith); the problem is that our loves are distorted and misdirected.



## Paul's Petition - The What

Love may grow exponentially...

- in knowledge (*επιγνωσις*, *epignosis*), particularly knowledge of God or truth.
- all perception (*πας αισθησις*, *pas aisthesis*), "depth of insight" (NIV) the capacity to understand, discernment = the practical outworking of knowledge (wisdom).



## Paul's Petition - The What

The central focus of Paul's concern is *agape* love that *cultivates* or *gives rise* to knowledge and perception.

- Knowledge apart from love, "puffs up while love builds up", and "will pass away" or "be ineffective" (1Cor 8:1, 13:8).
- While love without knowledge and perception (moral discernment) is no longer *agape* love.



## Paul's Petition - The Why

*that your agape love may grow exponentially  
in knowledge and all perception,  
so that you may be able to discern what is most important and  
may live pure and blameless lives until the day Christ returns,  
filled with the fruit of right living  
that comes through Jesus Christ  
and all of this is to the glory and praise of God.*



## Paul's Petition - The Why

### Immediate Purpose

- Ability to discern "what is most important", "what is best", "what really matters" (1:10).
- Discerning how to walk worthily, how to love well, how to distinguish between essentials and disputable things (see Rom 14-15).



## Paul's Petition - The Why

### Mediate Purpose

- "To live pure and blameless lives until the day Christ returns, filled with the fruit of right living."
- "...May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ" (1:10-11, NLT).



## Paul's Petition - The Why

- A discerning practical righteousness that begins when we start following Christ, but won't be complete "until the day Christ returns."



## Paul's Petition - The Why

### Ultimate Purpose

- "The glory and praise of God" (1:11).



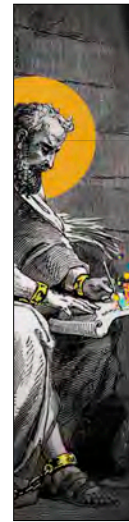
## Paul's Petition - The How

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## Paul's Petition - The How

All of this is only possible "through Jesus Christ" (1:11).



## Bringing it All Together

"Love is not something to be added to a list of Christian virtues; it is the starting point from which all good things – the best things, as Paul suggests – grow. Love, joined by knowledge (1:9), leads to discerning what is best (1:10), which leads to blamelessness and righteousness (doing and being what is best, 1:11). Discernment and holiness are not possible without love" (Jeannine K. Brown, *Philippians*, 73)





## Bringing it All Together

Paul emphasizes the priority of *agape love* in the Christian life above all else.

- Love is foundational to knowledge.
- Love is foundational for holiness.

And this love only comes from God through the Holy Spirit which is poured out into our hearts (Rom 5:5).



## Bringing it All Together

God, who is love, has demonstrated his love in Christ, and has poured out this love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.



This love gives rise to knowledge and moral wisdom, so we may discern those things which are most important.



Leads to developing dispositions and habits so we live lives filled with love, holiness, and integrity.



Brings glory and praise to God!



## Conclusions

All of this is the “good work” that God is doing in us through the Holy Spirit with the assurance that he “will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6).