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# Praying for Discerning Love

## Philippians 1:3-11

*Russ Kennedy*

**Introduction** Let's call these two people, Jane and Mary. Jane and Mary are great friends. They have gone to school together, married men who were themselves good friends. They came to know the Lord as adults and were part of a relatively new and growing church in their city. They both had a great love for missions, hungering to see people everywhere come to know the Lord. They threw themselves into the work of the mission's team, writing letters, gathering up needed supplies, sometimes out of their own pockets buying or making what was needed.

But then, trouble came. Over a particular popular missionary, Jane and Mary had a falling out. This missionary had been out in the field and was put in prison. Concerned for his welfare, the church had decided to send one of their elders to attend to his needs, bringing funds and other personal supplies to him. But Jane and Mary got into arguments as to what would be best. Soon, they were unable to speak to one another. They took to sitting on opposite sides of the church. What was supposed to have been a loving, working partnership had now become an increasingly public problem.

But, the church took great concern to maintain relationships. They went to almost any lengths to be sure that people treated each other well and loved one another. But the church was unwilling to address the problem with Jane and Mary. They were willing to let it just pass lest they have to confront one or both of them. They were willing to allow the conflict to continue in the name of loving them.

Loving one another is a good thing. As an overflow of our love for God, we are to love one another. It is the mark of true believers. Loving one another is at the heart of our being together as Christians.

Loving one another is sometimes confused with fear of man. Sometimes, people hide their fear of man under loving one another. They crave one another's affirmation and approval. Saying they love people, they do everything they can to keep peace.

Loving one another is often elevated at the expense of truth and discernment. Instead of lovingly helping one another's theological, doctrinal, or practical problems, we just let things go. We "love them" too much to hurt them. This is much like parents who won't spank their children because they "love them too much." This is not a mature love.

By the way, Jane and Mary are Euodia and Syntyche at the church at Philippi. You see, Philippians is primarily about "The Partnership in the Gospel". Paul is deeply concerned about the framing, fueling and failing of their unity – their unity with Paul and with one another. So this opening prayer is about how their love needs to grow. This important prayer should become a part of our praying for one another.

**Its Cause (v.3,7)**

Paul opens by giving the reason, the cause for his praying. His praying is flowing out of his relationship with them. I am praying for you because I have you in...

**In my Thoughts (v.3)**

"I remember you..." When he thought of them, he prayed for them. Paul thought of them and remembered them often. He did so with fondness that brought joy in praying.

**In my Affections (v.7)**

"I have you in my heart..." His love for them motivated him to pray for them. He held them in his affections, his love. They are going to identify strongly with this. It is a great privilege to be loved. We all love being loved.

Remembering them and loving them motivates him to pray for them. The poise of his heart is not just to think of them fondly. It is to pray from them fully.

**Its Basis (v.4-8)**

His praying for them is also rooted in what they had in common. The word here is *κοινωνία* – the fellowship of sharing.

**A Long-Term Partnership (v.4-5)**

Their long term partnership is sharing in the common gospel. It is the unity in what we believe.

**A Mutual Purpose (v.6)**

Their mutual purpose is a sharing in a common goal. It is the unity of what we will become.

**An Enabled Participation (v.7-8)**

Their enabled participation is a sharing in a common grace. It is the unity of what God is doing in us.

**Its Petition (v.9)**

Notice what Paul prays for. Here is the content, the petition of his prayer. He prays asking that their love to come to full expression as it grows in two important areas.

**To Increase in Knowledge**

Paul asks that they might increase in knowledge. He wants them to grow in their doctrinal content. He is asking God to help them to develop a full and experiential knowledge which is intimately acquainted with the thing known or loved.

**To Sharpen in Insight**

Paul is also asking that they might sharpen their insight. He wants them to grow in their spiritual perception. He is asking God to help them develop a keen dis-

cernment which makes wise decisions about how love is experienced and expressed.

## **Its Reason**

**(v.10)**

The twofold purpose for this prayer focuses our love, not purely on accepting, approving or affirming one another, but also on becoming a holy people together.

### **In What We Approve**

Paul expects that this prayer will produce discernment. As we grow in spiritual knowledge and discernment, we begin carefully thinking through what we approve as both the will of God and the wisdom from God.

### **In What We Value**

Paul also expects that this prayer will change what we value. As we grow in knowledge and discernment, we begin to prize being pure and holy before God, both now and in the Last Day.

## **Its Results**

**(v.11)**

A maturing love growing in knowledge and discernment is going to produce fruit. Paul uses a beautiful metaphor best captured in the translation by Moffat, "May your life be all covered with that harvest of righteousness which Jesus Christ produces for the praise and glory of God.

### **In a Rich Design**

Its results are because of its rich design. Growing in knowledge and discernment that causes us to approve what is excellent and prize holiness will fill our lives with the fruit of righteousness. Imagine a vineyard stretched out over a hillside. See its drooping branches bowed down with great clusters of grapes. This is a rich and full harvest.

This is what Paul expects. He prays this because he is longing to see them just loaded with a harvest of righteousness. This is practical righteousness, personal obedience.

He does not want them to be limp and weak and small clustered. He wants them rich and full, just gloriously bending over with great holiness. Is this what we strive for? Is this what we long for? Is this what we crave for others? So, do we pray in such a way with such expectations?

### **Through a Personal Relationship**

This harvest of righteousness is through Jesus Christ. It is what he produces. He does not produce it when we are passive, just waiting for it to happen. He produces it in the midst of the mess. He produces it through Christians growing and changing in the midst of difficulties and problems.

Here, that righteousness will be produced in organizing and orienting the people of the church to help Euodia and Syntyche to get along. This relationship with Christ, by His grace, energizes and enables the expression of love in what is ap-

proved and in what is attained. How will this fruit be produced by Christ? By prayer for one another and by hearing and heeding truths aimed to bring it to pass.

### **Towards a Glorious End**

This harvest of righteousness brings glory and praise to God. When He returns as the master of the vineyard, will He find a rich over-flowing harvest? When he does, then he is seen to be large, he praised. This glorious end is then achieved, that God is greatly praised, not just by what we say, but also by how we live.

### **Conclusion**

Let's pray like this. Let's love one another and think about one another in such a way that we pray for love to grow up in knowledge and discernment, so that people's lives will be loaded down with a harvest of holiness.

Let's prize this. If we do not value this in our lives or in the lives of others, we will probably not pray like this. We will pray for what presses us, for what has our attention and concern. So let's focus our beliefs and our wants on being this kind of people who pray in these kinds of ways.

Let's promote this. We need to grow in our practical experience and expressions of love. But we also need to grow in our knowledge and our discernment. We do not want to become critical or Pharisaical. We do want to wise towards righteousness. We want to know how to approve what is excellent so that we will be holy and blameless before God when He comes.

So, here is the pattern of this prayer:

Father, cause \_\_\_\_\_'s love to abound more and more in knowledge and discernment so that they may approve what is excellent and therefore, will be pure and blameless their lives all covered with that harvest of righteousness which Jesus produces for Your glory at Your coming.