

Explore the Bible: Joy in Prayer

August 13, 2021

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Sept. 5 focuses on Philippians 1:-11.*

It is difficult to believe that bad things happen to good people. In June 2011, my husband was involved in a tragic accident that nearly cost the loss of his legs and his life. Months of rehabilitation coupled with rounds of intravenous antibiotics slowly brought him back to a state of acceptable health.

During the long convalescence stage in the hospital, I had to remind him through all the physical pain, dark moments, and days of uncertainty, God heard and answered the joyous prayers of the congregation and the community concerning his recovery. Believers remained in unwavering confidence God not only heard the prayers, but waited patiently for the promise to heal his body. “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

The congregation developed a heart of compassion for their pastor, my husband, bringing great joy to his spirit with heart-felt compassion for the people. The members united in spirit to continue the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as well as to minister to the needs of the congregation and community. Both pastor and people were committed to pray joyously, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Colossians 4:2).

Growing in Love and Truth (Philippians 1:1-8)

In prison, Paul writes to the Philippian church while introducing himself as a slave to Jesus Christ. Believers understand Jesus Christ is the center of the joy in Paul's life, as Paul expresses the confidence in the believer's relationship and devotion to Christ. Paul is filled with joy when he remembers and prays for his friends because both share the love and passion for each other and Christ (v. 3-5).

During the lonely and sometime dark moments of my husband's hospital convalescence, the Holy Spirit led him to pray for the church, as well as others. The prayers were some of the most passionate, joyous and heart-felt petitions made to God, full of love and grace. In his convalescence, he remembered the struggles and successes of the congregation. He remembered the weddings, the baptisms and the burials. Most of all, he remembered the words of Paul, "being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (v. 6).

As believers, we will face setbacks, disappointments and dangers while becoming more Christlike. Jesus did not promise we would escape hardships, but he gives us joy for the journey. "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:11-12).

God has given us his only Son to bring us into a right relationship with him. Paul understood the magnitude of remaining in relationship with Christ, thereby experiencing "inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Peter 1:8).

How deep is your affection for the believers? Have you experienced the joy of the Lord when praying for others? Although Paul experienced numerous

hardships while spreading the gospel, he remained true to Christ and affectionate to the believers at Philippi. What can be worse than being in a Roman prison, not able to leave, or some other dark, damp, cold existence that prevents one from experiencing joyful prayers?

Abounding in the Gospel Fruit (Philippians 1:9-11)

There are serious right and wrong issues that need to be explored as it relates to morality concerning Christian character. Paul addresses the need for the church at Philippi to “grow in knowledge and every kind of discernment” (v. 9). The idea of growing in gospel fruit is illustrated throughout Paul’s journey. For example, Paul describes nine fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22-23). When we learn what pleases God, we will produce right character—fruit (Colossians 1:10). Paul longed to travel to Rome in order to produce fruit from his ministry (Romans 1:13). And as illustrated by the Philippian church, the giving of money and resources are needful gifts (Philippians 4:15).

Obtaining the knowledge and discernment Paul speaks about only can be accomplished through abounding in love. Mere human love satisfies the flesh, and not the spirit of man. The kind of love illustrated in the lesson is found in the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is the kind of love the Father displayed by allowing his dear Son to give his life freely by becoming a living sacrifice for all mankind. “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).

Paul’s intense love for the Philippian church and especially for Christ compels him to pray for all to abound in the gospel fruit so they “may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ” (v. 10). Is your character in line with the Christian faith and Scripture? Are there areas in your Christian character for improvement?

Margie Clayton is minister of education at Berean Tabernacle Baptist Church in Liberty, Texas.