



PRAYER: OUR FOUNDATION & OUR FUTURE

Week 4 | Praying for Potential Not Just Problems | Teacher: Dr JoAnn Hummel
Sermon Questions for 7.26.2026

OPENER

In the late 90s, Bent Tree was full of young leaders wrestling with growth, and we went looking for conferences and consultants to help us fix our problems. When Paul wrote to churches like Colossae, Galatia, and Corinth, he pulled out his apostolic authority to correct what was broken. But not with Philippi. Ten years after that church began, Paul calls himself a "servant," not an "apostle." He loves them, he trusts them, and they give him joy.

Philippians 1:9-11 is part of Paul's thank-you to a church he treasured, and the prayer he prays there widens our whole understanding of what prayer can be. Here is the surprising part: Paul wrote it from a Roman prison. His body was in chains, but his prayers roamed free. When his circumstances tightened, his prayers only widened outward.

This week JoAnn Hummel invites us to do the same, to pray for the people we love based on their potential in Christ, not just their problems. Not asking God to fix them, but to form them.

READ

Philippians 1:9-11 (with the surrounding context of Philippians 1:1-8)

MAIN POINTS

Paul prayed their love would grow, know, show, and overflow.

1. Love that Grows (v. 9)

The word for love here is "agape," a divine, unconditional love that sacrifices for the flourishing of another. Christ is the model, the one who loved us and gave himself for us (Romans 5:5, 8). "Keep on growing" is present tense, an ongoing action. Paul does not pray that the Philippians would simply have love, but that their love would keep maturing in Christ. More love means a deeper, ever-growing experience of God's own love.

2. Love that Knows (v. 10a)

Paul prays their love would grow "in knowledge and every kind of discernment," a love that is informed, wise, and morally perceptive. Knowledge is a deepening spiritual understanding of God in Christ, who is the perfection of knowledge. Discernment is the ability to apply spiritual truth skillfully. Love grows as we know God's character and will revealed in his Word and his Son, and as we discern how to apply our faith wisely in real situations.

3. Love that Shows (v. 10b)

Growing, knowing love shows itself in wise choices, approving "the things that are superior" and choosing what is best (Hebrews 5:14). "Pure and blameless" describes a life where our talk and our walk match. If we say we love but only please ourselves, or disconnect from others, that is not God's love. The self-sacrificing love Christ demonstrated should show through us, because love was never put in our hearts to stay.

4. Love that Overflows (v. 11)

Paul prays they would be "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ." Their love, flowing from their righteousness in Christ, bears fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus is the prompting cause, expressing his own love through them. And the purpose of all that fruit is to glorify and praise God, to lavish on him the praise he is due.

ENGAGE WITH GOD IN A GROUP

- Think of a time someone prayed for you not because something was wrong, but because they believed in what God was doing in you. What did that kind of prayer mean to you?
- Paul wrote to Philippi to express gratitude and encourage growth, not to fix problems. When you think about the people you pray for, do your prayers lean more toward fixing problems or forming potential? Why do you think that is?
- Paul prayed their love would "keep on growing." Where do you sense God inviting your love to mature right now?
- Love that knows requires knowledge and discernment. Where in your life do you most need discernment to know how to apply your faith wisely?
- "Pure and blameless" means our talk and our walk match. What is one area where you want your walk to catch up to your talk this week?
- Paul was in literal chains, yet his prayers roamed free. What "chains," whether emotional, situational, or comfort, tend to narrow your prayers rather than widen them?
- This week, choose one person who is healthy and doing well, and one person who needs healing, and pray for their potential in Christ, not just their problems. Who comes to mind, and what will you pray?

BOTTOM LINE

Praying for others is not asking God to fix them but to form them. It's praying for others' potential in Christ, not only about their problems.