

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Philippians 1:3-11 (EHV)

³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴Every time I pray for all of you, I always pray with joy, ⁵because of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am convinced of this very thing: that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷I am equally convinced that it is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, for both in my chains and in my defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all share in this grace with me. ⁸Yes, God is my witness of how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹And I pray that your love may still increase more and more in knowledge and every insight. ¹⁰This will result in your approval of the things that really matter, so that you will be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.



Dear Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit upon us so that what you've already started in us, may continue to grow until the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Some have been described as either a 'glass half full' or 'glass half empty' kind of people.

For example, some always seem to be thankful for what they have, no matter how small or insignificant. Some are thankful for every small opportunity which comes their way, even those annoying and inconvenient moments. Some appreciate every person God has placed in their life, even when they disagree with those around them. Some are even thankful for the scars and heartaches they've experienced in their life because those experiences helped them grow closer to God.

On the other hand, some are tempted to complain regularly because they figure they're missing out on what others possess. Some are tempted to whinge often about those who disrupt their best laid plans or purposely seek to avoid those who hold differing opinions. Some keep looking through shops and catalogues because they're not content with what they already have. Some are dissatisfied with God when he doesn't answer their prayers the way they want him to.

Without taking a poll right now, it's possible many of you might struggle to be thankful in all circumstances, especially when things go wrong with your health, your work, our society, your schools, and your loved ones.

Even in our own Christian fellowships you might struggle to be thankful.

You might not be thankful when your own names seem to be listed more frequently on church rosters. You might not be thankful when you don't get to sing your favourite hymns or songs. You may not be thankful when the sermon or the worship service goes longer than you want it to. You may not be thankful when you don't get your own way at meetings. You might not be thankful when others make jokes at your expense or when someone has a go at you. You may not be thankful when others force their opinion on you and don't seem to listen to what you've got to say. You might not be thankful when crabby old Mrs Gruffenpiffle makes a beeline for you after worship to whinge about all her troubles again. You might not be thankful when you hear stories of abuse or conflict or divisions in our church.

If we're honest with ourselves, the reason we're not always thankful is because most of our reasons for

thankfulness seem to be dependent on us getting our own way. Therefore, when we don't get what we want, we're unlikely to be thankful.

Knowing how we struggle to be thankful in all circumstances, especially when we don't get our own way, it comes as a surprise to hear St Paul being so thankful as he begins his letter to the congregation in Philippi.

And don't get him wrong! He's not denying the reality of the problems around him, after all, he's currently writing these words from prison. While we don't know the exact place or conditions of his incarceration, I guess we could say he has much less freedom of movement than what we have today, and he didn't have Netflix or Nintendo to keep him occupied with his time! Despite Paul's confinement, he's thankful for his imprisonment and for the opportunities God's given him to defend and confirm the gospel.

Similarly, Paul isn't blind and deaf to the issues facing the Philippian congregation. They're not a perfect congregation. They have some important relationship issues to work through. But he still begins his letter with thankfulness. In fact, most of his letters start with thankfulness, but what he's thankful for may not be what we're expecting.

Instead of thanking them for the way they welcomed him, or for all those times he enjoyed a cuppa and some cake with them, or for the way they faithfully served on committees, he thanks God for their *partnership* in the *gospel* – their partnership in the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins and the promise of life eternal through faith in him.

He doesn't thank them for anything *they've* done, but for what *God's* begun in them, knowing they haven't reached their maturity in the gospel yet. He thanks *God* for their *partnership* in God's grace. He prays that God will continue to build on what he's already started among them.

Perhaps knowing some of their love for each other is struggling, he also prays that their love might become abundant, especially the love which flows from the gospel of Jesus Christ as they learn to forgive each other and seek to be reconciled and unified in Christ.

But he also wants their love to come with attachments – the attachments of knowledge and discernment.

In this way love isn't just a sentimental feeling, but it's a love which seeks to understand and carefully discern between what is right and good and holy and excellent in God's eyes, and what isn't, as they live out the gospel in their lives and community. As he continues to partner with them in the gospel (even though he remains separated from their community), he's confident they'll continue to be filled with the righteousness of Christ. He's confident they'll do this because it's dependant on God to do these things through their faith in him.

Applying these words of God through St Paul to our own situation today, and no matter whether any of you are a glass half full or glass half empty type of person, how might you view yourselves and those around you if your own starting point was thankfulness to God for the *partnership* you share in the *gospel*?

For example, if your starting point for looking at each other is through the lens of your own selfish desires, your own self-centred expectations, and getting your own way, then it's possible you're going to be disappointed and whinge and complain and grumble about how unfair life is, and how selfish and ignorant and stupid other people are. It's also possible you might hold a grudge against God because he didn't meet your own expectations.

Unfortunately, wanting your own unrealistic expectations to be fulfilled as your foundation for satisfaction or joy or contentment or thankfulness will always disappoint you and lead you to despair!

On the other hand, if your starting point for looking at yourselves and each other is through the lens of thankfulness to God for the joyful message of the gospel, how might this free you from your own

disappointments and restore your joy?

For example, I've got good news for you all!

Jesus suffered and died for all those times you've been less than thankful for all the gifts and people God sent you. For the sake of Christ, you're all forgiven for complaining about your parents, your premier, your pastor, or any other person God placed in authority over you. You're forgiven for being selfish and for not helping and supporting others in their times of need. You're forgiven for those times you didn't come to someone's defence, didn't speak well of them, or didn't explain their actions in the kindest way. You're forgiven for not being content with what God's given you.

As you believe *in the gospel*, the good news of the forgiveness of all your sins for the sake of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, those sins are removed from you as far as the east is from the west!

Now, as God restores your peace and joy through the power of the gospel, both individually and corporately, how will that affect the way each of you partners with God's people *in this same gospel*?

Will you be willing to view each other with more grace? Will you be more merciful with each other? As you forgive as you've been forgiven by Christ, how will you express your forgiveness to those who have hurt you or let you down? Knowing the good work of God has begun but hasn't reached its fulfillment among you, how will you encourage each other *in the gospel* as you grow in your understanding? How will you learn to discern what is right and good and excellent in God's eyes? How will you bring glory to God as the fruit of righteousness benefits those around you?

What God has started in you hasn't yet come to its conclusion, which means God needs to keep encouraging you to grow and mature in your Christian faith together with your fellow Christians. You need to keep hearing the gospel and keep receiving the grace of God through his holy Sacraments. While Christ's work of forgiveness and salvation has been finished and completed on the cross, you're all still a work in progress as you learn how to partner with Christ and each other *in this gospel*.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter how much water you have in your glass, but it matters who gives you the precious gift of faith so you may believe *in the gospel*. It matters how God continues to bless your faith as you live *in the gospel* in partnership with each other. It matters how God will complete what he's started among you.

This means you can all thank God for what he's begun, what he's currently doing, and what he'll continue to work in and among you as you *partner in the divine blessings of the gospel*.

May you all continue to grow and mature in the *partnership of the gospel* so that you may all know and discern the excellent work of God among you as you love as you've been loved by God, forgive as you've been forgiven by God, and serve as you've been served by God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may you all learn to be *thankful to God for the gospel*, learn to bear the fruit of righteousness in your community, and bring glory and praise to God!

And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Stuart Kleinig
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