

Yearning
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
Philippians 1:3-11
Prayer Sermon Series
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INTRODUCTION: Yearning (“longing, craving, hunger, thirst, ache”) is our intense desire when separated from someone or something we love. Like a dehydrated deer, David “pants,” or yearns for God (Psalm 42). He is weary, exhausted, anxious, and perplexed. Many of the Psalms speak of being parched, thirsty, dry, and gasping. Paul yearns to be with his friends (Philippians 1:8). During hardship, he built strong bonds with the new believers there. He linked “yearn” with *“affection of Christ Jesus”* (verse 8). He had great affection for the Philippians. He seemed nostalgic as he reflected upon “the good ol’ days” (was being thrown into the Philippian prison *“the good ol’ days?”*). Acts 16 is this story. He had affection for the Thessalonians too: *“But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy”* (1 Thessalonians 2:17-20). Indifference, sloth, apathy, disinterest, and a lack of sympathy are the opposites of yearning. It’s the danger of the lukewarm heart (*“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked”* Revelation 3:15-17). It is easy (natural) to grow cold in the faith. Following Jesus is NOT about emotion—it is about affection.

APPLICATION: What is the difference between emotion and affection? People of faith yearn for two things: God and people. “Yearning” is about having a heart for the things of God. Jesus said: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22:37-39). Jesus asks: *“How is your love life?”* That is our question too.

#5 in our prayer sermon series: **Praise/Pardon/Reconciliation/Accord**. Now **Yearn**. Before reading Philippians 1:3-11, Paul wrote in Phil. 2:1-2: *So, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the*

Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Last week I said sometimes believers have discord. Paul & his friend, Barnabas, had a dispute about young John Mark, who had abandoned them on their 1st missionary journey. Mark wanted to go on the 2nd journey. Barnabas wanted to give him a 2nd chance. Paul refused. The dispute led to separation. It was a Win/Win or no deal. So, Barnabas took Mark; Paul took Silas. Paul later reconciled & expressed appreciation & affection for Mark (2 Timothy 4:11). By separating they multiplied, not subtracted, in missional impact. (Acts 15). Acts 16 = a watershed moment in the New Testament. Paul at Troas (in modern day Turkey in Asia Minor) had a vision of a man saying, *“Come over to Macedonia & help us.”* 16:10 says, *“And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”* They left Troas & went west to Europe. Had Paul gone east to Asia, Christian history might be very different. Paul’s first headquarters was in Philippi. In Acts 16, Paul met a wealthy woman, Lydia, a slave girl possessed by an evil spirit, & the Philippian jailor. It appears the first church established in Europe was at Philippi. Paul loved them. It seems they were his favorite church. They supported him from the first day throughout his ministry. He missed them. Furthermore, Paul wrote them from prison in Rome or Ephesus where he could be executed.

Philippians has such memorable quotes: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Philippians 1:3-11

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

1.) *how I yearn for you all* Yearning is **emotional**. It is how we feel over something missing, lost, or gone. On the one hand, yearning is positive. We miss something or someone we are bonded to. We don't yearn for something we dislike. I don't yearn to eat olives or Brussel sprouts, but I yearn to see my grandkids and to return to Israel.

Yearning is **relational**. Michael Buble wrote a song, "Home." The Canadian crooner had been touring in Europe and became homesick. This was the first song he wrote – all had been "covers" others had written he sang. They waited until returning to the US to release it because who would feel sorry for him spending time in Paris and Rome. One line goes, "*I'm lucky I know, but I want to go home.*" Being homesick or lovesick is when we miss someone or something that has been lost, whether temporarily or permanently. We've been *yearning* during COVID. We've yearned to see family and friends. We have yearned to return for worship.

2.) *how I yearn for you all* **with the affection of Christ Jesus**. Jesus' had affection for people:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And he laid his hands on them and went away. (Matthew 19:14-15)

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. (John 11:33-35)
But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. (Luke 23:34)

And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:42-43)

It can be very difficult for some to embrace the affection of Jesus. Most of the Pharisees (like the older brother following the rules); most of the Roman soldiers who gloried in military might and power; and one of the two men crucified next to Him. It's also true for many of us. That may be due to the way we were raised (my dad). It can be hard for us to express/receive affection.

3) ⁹ *And it is **my prayer** that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.* In all his writings, Paul never prays for changes in circumstances for his friends. He doesn't pray they'll get a better emperor, that the Romans will treat them respectfully, or for any stuff. He prayed his friends

would love God/love others. I think that this sense of “yearning” of having deep affection for 2 things that are the key to following Jesus: Yearning for God and people. Jesus said: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22:37-39).

If we don’t love God, it’s because we don’t know God. To know God is to love Him. After all, God IS love. Prayer is our sense of yearning to be with God. We also yearn for others to love Him, too. That’s why our mission statement is: *“Helping Others Follow Jesus.”* We yearn for them to follow Him. If they don’t follow Jesus, who or what will they follow?

When a teen, Luca, had a huge crush on Harry Styles of the Band, “One Direction.” While she had no interest in war movies, she went to see a World War II movie, “Dunkirk,” only because her heartthrob was in it. Luca did not know what character Harry played. She waited eagerly for him to appear. Every time a new face came on the screen, Luca shrieked, *“That’s him! That’s Harry!”* A moment later she’d add, *“No, that’s not him.”* She repeated these two lines through the whole movie. Since the characters wore helmets and uniforms, had soot on their faces, and bobbed in the English Channel, Luca could never clearly identify her crush. Nevertheless, she kept her eyes glued to the screen for nearly two hours.

We concentrate when we are passionate. We can block out all distractions. As Jesus said, *“Where your treasure is, there shall your heart be, also.”* A key to success is making the kingdom of God our treasure – loving the King and His court. It is amazing what happens when we are motivated. Maybe THE key to success as a follower of Jesus = to yearn for Him and for His people. That’s what I think happened after the Resurrection. Jesus was their treasure. They started a movement that turned the world upside down.

My favorite moment this week happened Friday when I was talking to a member of Asbury who was volunteering at our COVID clinic. He told me he had received a text this week from his adult daughter who, after all these years, surrendered her life to Jesus. With tears in his eyes, this dad told me, *“There’s nothing better for a dad to hear than that!”* That’s why we’re here – “Helping Others Follow Jesus.”

There’s not a better treasure in the world than Jesus. There’s not a better mission in the world than to follow Him and help others do the same. Have you surrendered your life to Him? Today is the day. I invite you to be His follower today and to invite others to follow Him, too.