

Sometimes, in the middle of a crowded store on a Saturday afternoon, my husband will rest his hand on my neck, or on the soft flesh belted at my waist, and pull me to him. I understand

his question: Why are we so fortunate when all around us, friends are falling prey to divorce and illness? It seems intemperate to celebrate in a more conspicuous way

so we just stand there, leaning in to one another, until that moment of sheer blessedness dissolves and our skin, which has been touching, cools and relents,

settling back into our separate skeletons as we head toward Housewares to resume our errands.

"Leaning In" by Sue Ellen Thompson
from *The Golden Hour* (2006)

Today, O Lord, I say YES! to you, to life,
to all that is true, and good, and beautiful. Amen.

Richard Foster, *Prayers from the Heart*



"PAUL IS A SAINT. MINNEAPOLIS, NO WAY."

Monday Morning

I thank my God for every remembrance of you, always in every one of my prayers for all of you, praying with joy for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart, for all of you are my partners in God's grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the tender affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what really matters, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.



Philippians 1:1-11, NRSV

O God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, we thank you that we may be together to hear your word of life and hope. We are all equal before you. You know our life in its deepest recesses. You have not forgotten us; you love us, and again and again you fill the empty hands which we stretch out towards you. Through the suffering and death of your Son Jesus Christ, you took our darkness and fear upon yourself in order that we might know light and joy.

prayer of the Waldensian Church

Every time you cross my mind, I break out in exclamations of thanks to God. Each exclamation is a trigger to prayer. I find myself praying for you with a glad heart. I am so pleased that you have continued on in this with us, believing and proclaiming God's Message, from the day you heard it right up to the present. There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears.

It's not at all fanciful for me to think this way about you. My prayers and hopes have deep roots in reality. You have, after all, stuck with me all the way from the time I was thrown in jail, put on trial, and came out of it in one piece. All along you have experienced with me the most generous help from God. He knows how much I love and miss you these days. Sometimes I think I feel as strongly about you as Christ does!

So this is my prayer: that your love will flourish and that you will not only love much but well. Learn to love appropriately. You need to use your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent, not sentimental gush. Live a lover's life, circumspect and exemplary, a life Jesus will be proud of: bountiful in fruits from the soul, making Jesus Christ attractive to all, getting everyone involved in the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:1-11, *The Message* paraphrase

Because Christians are members of a community, their commitment is expressed in Christian fellowship. Paul refers twice in these verses to the fact that the Philippians have "shared" in the gospel and in grace; clearly they have shared not only in what they have received, but also in what they have given. The Christian community is called to partnership in the gospel (1:5) by helping the work of evangelism and in mutual support of other Christians by prayer and giving.



Many of our own letters begin with a "thank you," and in view of the fact that he has received money from the Philippians, we might well expect Paul to do the same. As in all his letters (with the exception of Galatians) Paul does, indeed, begin with thanksgiving, but his thanks are directed not to the Philippians but to God. Whether or not there is a subtle allusion to the Philippians' gift in these opening verses, it is God who is thanked for the Philippians' response to the gospel, since God is the source of that gospel (1:5) and the one who not only began the good work in them but can be depended upon to complete it as well. Paul praises God rather than the Philippians for their

faithfulness and support, since whatever they do is a sharing in the gospel they have received and a sharing in God's grace as well (1:7).

Our own prayers turn very quickly to petition and intercession, and we frequently take for granted the gift of the gospel and God's grace. Paul, on the contrary, pours out his heart in gratitude to God for all God has done and is continuing to do. This attitude pervades the whole epistle; even when Paul refers in 1:7 to his own imprisonment, he describes the Philippians as those who "share in God's grace." We might have expected him to say that they shared in his suffering! But he regards every circumstance as an experience of grace; therefore, his

first response is thanksgiving, not petition. Paul's constant prayers of thanksgiving for the Philippian church would undoubtedly have strengthened his own bonds with that community. In our prayers for other Christians, do we spend enough time remembering them with joy, with confidence, and with love, or do we rush straight into intercession for them? We sometimes worry about how intercession works, as though prayer is empty unless it brings about certain results. We would do well to remember the saying of Meister Eckhart: "If the only prayer you ever say in your life is 'thank you,' that would be sufficient."