

Main Idea: By his example in Philippians 1:3-11, Paul gives us two very helpful guidelines for how to pray, and specifically how to pray for fruit.

- I. Guideline #1: Let the gospel shape the way you pray (3-8).
 - A. Because of the gospel, Paul prayed with thanksgiving (3).
 - B. Because of the gospel, Paul prayed with joy (4-6).
 - C. Because of the gospel, Paul prayed with affection (7-8).
 1. Paul was a person who thought carefully and felt deeply.
 2. By his example Paul points us to Christ.
- II. Guideline #2: Let the gospel shape what you pray (9-11).
 - A. Petition #1: May God give you a growing love (9).
 1. God-pleasing love requires knowledge.
 2. God-pleasing love requires insight.
 - B. Petition #2: May God give you greater discernment (10a).
 1. Life is full of choices between legitimate options.
 2. In every decision we should choose what is best.
 - C. Petition #3: May God give you a godly reputation (10b).
 1. What’s needed isn’t our perfection.
 2. What’s needed is that we deal with every sin God’s way.
 - D. Petition #4: May God give you the fruit of righteousness (11).
 1. It comes through Jesus Christ.
 2. It results in glory to God.

Getting Radical in 2011: In the coming year I urge you to...

1. Pray for the entire world.
2. Read through the entire Word.
3. Sacrifice your money for a specific purpose.
4. Spend your time in another context.
5. Commit your life to a multiplying community.

A couple of weeks ago as I was thinking about the new year and this first message of the new year, and I thought of two things. One, if we’re going to please the Lord as a church and individually in 2011, we need to give priority attention to the activity of prayer. And two, if we’re going to pray as we ought, we need regular reminders of what God-pleasing prayers look and sound like, for we are so prone to misuse prayer.

One prayer in particular came to mind. I’d like for us to study it this morning and then pray it as a church this year. I want us to study it to make sure we’re thinking rightly about prayer. And I want us to pray it, not merely recite it, but allow the framework of this prayer to guide the way we pray in the next twelve months.

Let’s turn to Philippians 1. It’s there that Paul tells us exactly what he was praying for the church in the city of Philippi. In short, he was *praying for fruit*. That’s what he says at the climax of his prayer in verse 11, “filled with the fruit of righteousness.”

Filled with fruit. Would you like that phrase to describe the people you care about in 2011? I would. Well, then, don’t miss this. There’s a connection between prayer and fruit. Paul saw prayer as a vital contributor to seeing a church he cared deeply about be filled with fruit.

Most people I know say they pray, even people who don’t consider themselves religious. But speaking frankly, not so many people, including yours truly, pray the way Paul prayed. Do you want to see fruit in the people and ministries of this church this year? Then let’s learn from Paul about praying for fruit, and then follow in his steps.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message has been adapted from a message preached in 2008 at WBC (7/27/08) in a series on “The Prayers of Paul.” We revisit it today because of its relevance in helping us know how to pray for ourselves, our families, and our church family in the new year.

By his example in Philippians 1:3-11, Paul gives us two very helpful guidelines for how to pray in 2011, and specifically how to pray for fruit.

I. Guideline #1: Let the gospel shape the way you pray (3-8).

Here's what I mean. When the apostle Paul penned the words before us, around AD 61, he was in prison in Rome, incarcerated for the crime of telling people about Jesus (check out Acts 28 for further details). And what's he doing there? He says he's praying for his brothers in Philippi. What kind of prayers? Gospel-shaped prayers.

Paul's relationship with the church at Philippi went back about a dozen or so years. It was during his second missionary journey (recorded in Acts 16) that the apostle, responding to a vision in which he saw a man from Macedonia pleading for him to come, sailed to Europe and ended up at Philippi.²

It's worth noting that in his first order of business, Paul went to the river to find a place of prayer.³ There he met a businesswoman named Lydia, and "the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (as Acts 16:14 states). Lydia opened her home to Paul and his team and in time a church began.

It was quite a church. There was the slave girl there that Paul had rescued from demon possession. There was the jailor and his family, too, that Paul led to Christ right inside the jail.⁴ So this was a special church to Paul. No wonder he prayed for it the way he did. It ought not surprise us that since it was the gospel that took Paul to Philippi in the first place, the prayer he prayed for them was thoroughly gospel-centered.⁵ Prayer is a vital part of gospel ministry.

A lot of people have heard of William Carey, the father of modern missions. Few have heard of his sister who, although bedridden for years, spent hours each day calling on God in behalf of her brother and other preachers of the gospel.⁶ As a prisoner Paul couldn't preach in Philippi, but he could pray for that ministry, and he did.

I'm so thankful for our shut-ins who view prayer as a vital part of ministry. I think of Lacy, for instance. She can't entertain missionaries like she once did, or teach a children's class, or fix a meal for someone in need, but there's something she can do from her hospital bed at home. She can pray, and she does.

Here's the first guideline. Let the gospel shape the way you pray in 2011, like Paul did. Three words characterized Paul's perspective as he prayed for the Philippians.

A. Because of the gospel, Paul prayed with thanksgiving (3). "I thank my God every time I remember you." Paul *thanked* God every time this church came to his mind. It wasn't because they'd arrived and were problem-free, and he will challenge them with some needed changes later in the letter, for instance, urging a couple of ladies to put a disagreement behind them (4:2). Nonetheless Paul continually expressed gratitude to God for this church, indeed *every time* he prayed, because he had the gospel in mind.

B. Because of the gospel, Paul prayed with joy (4-6). Verse 4—"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy." There's a word you don't expect to hear from the lips of a man in prison—*joy*—and you hear it a lot in this letter (the words "joy" and "rejoice" appear in every chapter, some thirteen times).

² Philippi was a Roman colony named after King Philip II, father of Alexander the Great. Being a Roman colony meant its citizens were also citizens of the city of Rome itself, a fact in which the Philippians took great pride.

³ Since there wasn't a synagogue in Philippi.

⁴ He later returned during his third missionary journey, according to Acts 20:6 (which took place during the years AD 53-57).

⁵ He mentions "the gospel" in verses 5, 7, & 12.

⁶ Observation by D. A. Carson, p. 123.

What caused Paul to pray for the Philippian church with such joy? He tells us. In fact, he puts the details of his prayer on hold until verse 9 and begins to share the reason for his joy in verses 4-8. What brought his joy in prayer? Two things...

1. *He had it because of what the Philippians had done and were still doing (5).* Verse 4—"I always pray with joy." Why? Verse 5—"because of your partnership [Greek *koinonia*] in the gospel from the first day until now." These folks were *partners* with Paul in the gospel ministry, and they'd been so for nearly a dozen years, from the *first day until now*.

What made them partners with Paul? He says, "your partnership *in the gospel*." They were linked together because of the *gospel*, that is, the message of the person and work of Jesus Christ. These Philippians knew the difference the gospel had made in their lives, and they wanted the same to happen with others. So they partnered with Paul.

How? For starters, they sent Paul money for ministry and personal needs. Then later they sent him personnel (check out 2:25 & 4:14-19). This letter of Philippians is actually a "thank you" letter. Paul is thanking this church for their gifts of money and for sending Epaphroditus who not only delivered the latest gift of money, but also cared for Paul's personal needs while imprisoned.

No wonder Paul prayed with joy. But there's another reason, also linked to the gospel, that caused him to pray with joy.

2. *He had it because of what God had done and would certainly do to the end (6).* Verse 6—"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

When Paul prayed for the Philippian church, he did so with confidence, and his confidence was rooted in God. He knew God had begun a good work in them, because He saw it firsthand. He saw God open Lydia's heart to the gospel message (Acts 16:15 is very specific, stating, "The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message"). He saw God do the same with the jailor and the rest of his household. *God* began a good work in Philippi. And what God begins, God finishes. The God who began a good work in you *will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*.

Beloved, salvation begins with God and it ends with God. When I was eleven years old I saw God begin a good work in me (actually He began that work before creation, according to Ephesians 1:4, but I recognized it at age eleven). He convicted me of my sin and opened my heart to the wonderful, liberating news that Jesus Christ His Son had died in my place and for my sin, that Christ had conquered death, and that through Christ I could be made right with God and live with God forever. Has God begun that good work in your life? If He has, you can be sure He will finish it.

More than a decade later, Paul probably had ugly scars on his back from the beating he received in Philippi, but that's not what came to mind when he thought of that city. He thought of a group of people that God used him to reach with the gospel, a people that returned his love by meeting his needs, and that caused him to pray, first with thanksgiving, and then with joy. Thirdly...

C. Because of the gospel, Paul prayed with affection (7-8). "It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."

Sometimes we think of Paul as being a great *thinker*, and indeed he was that. But he was also a great *feeler*. He says, "It is right for me *to feel this way about you*. I have you *in my heart*. I *long for you* with the *affection* of Christ Jesus."

1. *Paul was a person who thought carefully and felt deeply.* And oh how we need both qualities in their proper balance. He *thought carefully*, meaning he filled his

mind with the Scriptures and used his mind to wrestle with the implications of the truths contained in them. But he also *felt deeply* with feelings that were firmly anchored in the certainties of God's Word.

How deeply? Notice verse 8 again, "I long for you with the affection of Christ Jesus." Now that's affection! Christ so loved us that He left heaven, let soldiers nail Him to a cross, and endured hell for us. Don't miss this.

2. *By his example Paul points us to Christ.* My friend, how can we say we believe in the person and work of Christ and *not* be moved by it? We ought to *feel deeply* the staggering implications of the gospel! Why then, so often, don't we? It's because in order to *feel deeply* we must first *think carefully*, not superficially but think *carefully*.

It's true. We were heading for eternal torment—that's what we deserved—but Christ took our place. On the cross God's own Son took the judgment we deserved, so that on the basis of His Son's substitutionary work God might pardon and adopt us as His sons and daughters. *Think carefully* about that, and then in response, you will *feel deeply*.

And specifically, you will feel deeply for the people in whose lives you see the gospel at work. And you won't just feel, you'll pray for them.

So I challenge you. Let the gospel shape the way you pray in 2011. That's how Paul could both be in prison *and* pray joy-filled prayers. He saw life through gospel glasses.

Is that true of you? It starts by being gripped by the gospel, repenting, and placing your faith in Christ alone. But that's just the beginning. I urge you to think carefully about the cross on a daily basis. Think about what Christ did, and why. Think about the implications of the cross. If we're going to pray as Paul did, we must let the gospel shape the way we think about life and pray.

II. Guideline #2: Let the gospel shape what you pray (9-11).

In verses 9-11 Paul reveals exactly what he was asking God to do for his dear friends in Philippi. He mentions four petitions that function like stair-steps.

A. Petition #1: May God give you a growing love (9). "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight..."

Paul asked God to do something regarding the church's love. He uses the Greek *agape*. *Agape* is God's kind of love (John 3:16). It starts in a person's will and then shows up as the person chooses to do what's right towards another.

Please observe that Paul doesn't pray that they would *begin* to love, but that their love would *abound*. He is not suggesting by this request that the Philippians had a glaring problem. But even solid, serving Christians haven't arrived.

The term 'abound' means "to be over and above." Picture an empty cup. When you take the pitcher and start pouring, the level rises from 1/4 to 1/2 to 3/4 and finally, it's full. What happens if you keep pouring? The cup overflows. It can't contain the contents.

That's the kind of love Paul prayed to see in his friends' lives. An abounding love. An overflowing love. Love is like a muscle. Use it and its capacity for greater use grows and expands. Stop using it and it shrivels up.

But there's more. In order for love to grow, there are two essentials.

1. *God-pleasing love requires knowledge.* "May your love abound more and more *in knowledge*." Husbands, you have learned by now that it takes knowledge to love your wife. Peter put it this way in 1 Peter 3:7 (KJV), "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife..." Men, we can do what we *think* is an expression of our love and fail to show true love, right? Just because the gift you buy your wife is something *you* like doesn't mean it'll be something *she* likes. So Peter says, "Study her. Dwell with her according to *knowledge*."

Later in this letter Paul is going to share what made him tick. He says in Philippians 3:10, “I want to *know Christ*.” You can’t love someone you don’t know. That was Paul’s consuming desire, to know and be like Christ. And he saw this pursuit as an ongoing process, as he clarifies in the following verses (Phil 3:12-14), “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

So we need knowledge. What’s more...

2. *God-pleasing love requires insight.* “In knowledge and depth of insight,” prays Paul. Before you can show love you must first *see* the opportunity. Since we’re self-focused sinners by nature, we don’t naturally see the needs of others. Paul prayed, “Lord, give them eyes to see. Give them *insight* so their love will abound.”

So love, if it's to be biblical, must be based upon *knowledge* and *insight*. Those are the boundaries in which God-pleasing love is exercised. If we go beyond the boundaries, it's no longer true love. In fact, when love is not based upon knowledge and insight, you can actually do more harm than good to the cause of Christ.

Suppose I'm watching television, and hear a plea for help for starving children in Sudan. I'm moved. And so I should be. I see the 800 number on the screen. I get out my visa card, and send them \$50. Did I do the right thing? Maybe, maybe not. Did I check out the organization that's handling the money? Does it operate by integrity? Is this ministry gospel-driven?

A man knocked on my door once and asked for money for a ministry. I gave him some money and later found out it was a cult. Now I ask questions. Friends, sincerity is not enough. Love must be directed by *knowledge* and *insight*.

This is huge. If you’re not willing to learn, you won’t love God’s way.

Keep in mind, Paul prayed for this. This is his first petition for the Philippians. May God give you a growing love. I urge you to pray this prayer for your kids this year, parents. Teens, I urge you to pray this for your parents. Pray this for your pastors and deacons and trustees and Sunday School class members. Lord, give us a growing love.

But don’t stop there. Notice the next two words in the text, “so that.” Those words indicate that a growing love is not an end, but a means to something. A means to what? Verse 10—“so that you may be able to discern what is best...” That brings us to the second step on Paul’s prayer staircase...

B. Petition #2: May God give you greater discernment (10a). The fact is...

1. *Life is full of choices between legitimate options.* Every day we make choices, hundreds and hundreds of them. From the mundane, what time should I get up, and what should I wear? To the more significant, what should I do with my time and money today?

What should we choose? Paul tells his friends what he prayed they would choose, “That you may be able to discern *what is best*” [“things that are excellent” says the KJV]. The term “best” [“excellent”] means “to make a difference.”

It's sad, yet true. Many times in our lives we get distracted, even sidetracked. We're prone to set our sights on things which in themselves are not be bad, but are not the best.

Paul isn’t praying that they’ll choose the good over the bad. That’s a given. You don’t even need to pray about whether to sin. Should I lie on my income tax? Should I deceive my parents? Should I look at a little pornography? The answer to sinful options is always *no*.

This prayer is about legitimate options. Paul is burdened that the Philippians *not* do what we're all so prone to do, and that is, settle for the merely *good*.

2. *In every decision we should choose what is best.* Henry Kissinger, in his book *The Whitehouse Years*, tells of a Harvard professor who had given an assignment and now was collecting the papers. He handed them back the next day and at the bottom of one was written, "Is this the best you can do?" The student thought, "no," and redid the paper. It was handed in again, and received the same comment. This went on ten times, till finally the student said, "Yes, this is the best I can do." The professor replied, "Fine, now I'll read it."⁷

D. A. Carson observes, "Paul's prayer spells the death of entrenched mediocrity, of smug self-satisfaction, of contentment with our own excuses. Paul prays for what is excellent."⁸

Are we choosing what is best when we spend our money on new clothes and furniture without first giving generously to help those who have none? Or when we sacrifice so we can go on our dream vacations without first sacrificing so our missionaries can fulfill their dreams and go rescue the perishing in places where Christ is not known?

The question is always, are we choosing what is *best*? Are we choosing what is best when we go to our kids ballgames and band competitions and miss out on opportunities to learn God's Word and pray with our church family? How about when we spend three hours on a Tuesday evening in front of a television set or Facebooking rather than reading a book that will stir our affections for the things of Christ?

Again, we're not talking about sinful options. There's nothing wrong with ballgames or music lessons or Facebook or dream vacations. But the question is always, are we choosing what is best?

Carson asks an important question, "What have you read in the past six months? If you have found time for newspapers or news magazines, a couple of whodunits, a novel or two or perhaps a trade journal, have you also found time for reading a commentary or some other Christian literature that will help you better understand the Bible or improve your spiritual discipline or broaden your horizons? Are you committed, in your reading habits, to what is best?"⁹

Think about what this prayer reveals to us about Paul the man. Paul wasn't interested in maintaining status quo. Because he knew where he was heading—to see Christ and be clothed in His spotless righteousness—because he knew that was coming, he revolved to press toward that mark in the present. As Carson reminds us, "The more fruitful and the more holy he becomes, the more he perceives how much farther he has to go."¹⁰

Now notice the relationship between these first two petitions. May God give you a growing love, *so that* you may have a greater discernment. There's a vital truth here. If our love isn't growing, then we will not be able to choose what is best. If we're living in the vacuum of self-focused-ness, we will lack the ability to discern the *best* from the good.

Which raises another question. How can I know what *the best* is? We find the answer as we ponder Paul's third request. Notice how verse 10 ends, "So that you may be able to discern what is best *and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.*" That's interesting. Paul's second and third requests are bound together by the word

⁷ From Henry Kissinger's *The Whitehouse Years*.

⁸ D. A. Carson, p. 125.

⁹ D. A. Carson, pp. 128-9.

¹⁰ Carson, p. 131.

“and.” I’m praying that you will discern what is best *and* be pure and blameless.” That indicates that choosing what is *best* always goes hand in hand with his third petition...

C. Petition #3: May God give you a godly reputation (10b). *Pure and blameless.* The term “pure” [KJV “sincere”] means “to be clear when examined in the sunlight.” How do you check to see if your sunglasses are clean? You hold them up to the light. The light reveals the spots.

Paul prayed that the reputation of the Philippians would be clear and clean when held up to *the* Light. There's no place for sin spots in the Christian's life.¹¹

1. *What's needed isn't our perfection.*

2. *What's needed is that we deal with every sin God's way.* “Until the day of Christ,” says Paul. That is, until the day Christ returns. The word “until” in this phrase carries the sense of “with a view towards.”¹² Folks who live with a view towards the day when Christ will return are the folks who will make wise decisions in the daily present. We need to live, as Carson puts it, with a “forward-looking dimension.”

Carson offers this helpful word picture. “The church is to see itself as an outpost of heaven. It is a microcosm of the new heaven and the new earth, brought back, as it were, into our temporal sphere. We are still contaminated by failures, sin, relapses, rebellion, self-centeredness; we are not yet what we ought to be. But by the grace of God, we are not what we were. For as long as we are left here, we are to struggle against sin, and anticipate, so far as we are able, what it will be like to live in the untarnished bliss of perfect righteousness. We are to live with a view to the day of Christ.”¹³

Church family, that's what we are. We are an outpost of heaven. We are citizens of another kingdom, living in foreign and at times hostile territory. We won't be here forever, but while we are here we are to represent the agenda of our Master and Savior. And to fulfill that assignment we need a reputation that speaks well of Him.

Paul prayed to that end, and so should we. *Lord, help us as a church to have a reputation that is pure and blameless. And when there's something staining that reputation, as there surely will be from time to time, give us grace and humility to go to work on that stain, for Your honor.*

Now we've come to the stop of the staircase.

D. Petition #4: May God give you the fruit of righteousness (11). “Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” Fruit, as you know, is the visible produce of the tree. The fruit of righteousness is the visible produce that ought to be seen in our lives, the right kind of living. And what's true of this fruit of righteousness? Two things...

1. *It comes through Jesus Christ.* We don't manufacture it. He does. Therefore, when it's present...

2. *It results in glory to God.* “To the glory and praise of God.”

Do you know how to tell the difference between religious activity and fruit? Religious activity is something we do in our own strength. Genuine fruit must be produced in us by Christ. Religious activity impresses men. Genuine fruit results in praise to God.

A couple of weeks ago I was reading a recent edition of *Voice of the Martyrs*.¹⁴ I read about Gloria, a faithful pastor's wife in Columbia whose husband was murdered by

¹¹ What Paul prayed for the Philippians was the standard he held for himself. For example, when he stood before Felix he shared his ambition in Acts 24:16, “And in this do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and men.”

¹² Observation by Carson, p. 135.

¹³ Carson, pp. 135-6.

¹⁴ *Voice of the Martyrs*, December 2010.

communist guerrillas, who remains passionate about sharing Christ even now as a single mom. That's the fruit of righteousness, my friend, and when I read about it, I want you to know that fruit resulted in praise to God!

The same thing happened when I read about Benjamin, a Nigerian boy who at the age of five was burned severely by Muslim extremists who set his house on fire just because his family was Christian. His father rescued him from the flames, but then he watched in horror as the militants shot his father, then killed his two older brothers, his two older sisters, and his brother's wife and child. Benjamin, who's sixteen now, says, "At first I wanted revenge on the Muslims who killed my family. But now I want to leave everything to God. God will take care of everything. I want to help Nigeria. I want to stop all of these religious riots. I want Nigeria to be the most peaceful country in the world. Only God can do that for Nigeria." That's the fruit of righteousness, beloved, and it ought to cause our hearts to burst into praise for the One who produced it.

Now take a look back at Paul's petitions. He prayed that God would grant the Philippian Christians a *growing love*, which would make possible *greater discernment* as well as a *blameless reputation* and the *fruit of righteousness*. Those are gospel-centered requests because nothing other than the gospel of Jesus Christ can make them possible.

Now here's where the rubber meets the road. Are these the kind of requests that you've been asking God to grant, for yourself and for others you care about? Is this what you're praying for?

"How much have we prayed for what is best," asks D. A. Carson, "for a spiritual harvest, for conversions, for demonstrations of the fruit of the Spirit? Could it be that we have experienced little because we have asked for little? Is our unfruitfulness proportionate to our prayerlessness? Paul's prayer knifes through so many of our excuses."¹⁵

We just finished reading a book together as a church family, David Platt's *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*. The word "radical" comes from the Latin *radix* which means "root." So radical isn't wild and crazy. Radical simply means getting back to the root of a matter.

Let's do that in 2011. Let's get radical, and by radical I mean let's get back to the fundamentals. If we're going to do that in a sustained way, we need a plan and accountability. That's why I recently challenged each of our Sunday School classes, from junior high and up, to spend a few moments each week praying about and encouraging one another in the fulfillment of five challenges Platt calls *The Radical Plan*.

Getting Radical in 2011: In the coming year I urge you to...

1. *Pray for the entire world.* I recommend you get either the book *Operation World* or use the website to guide you on a daily basis. Learn and pray for the countries of the world. SS teachers, talk about the countries on the weekly prayer schedule and pray in your classes. Dads and moms, pray at mealtimes for the country of the day. Deacons, pray for the Lord to send laborers from us into His harvest in these countries. Also, I urge you to make our Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services a priority, for that is when we invest time as a church to pray for our missionaries and hear reports of their ministries around the world.

2. *Read through the entire Word.* I'm so thankful for a Sunday School teacher who challenged me to read through the New Testament when I was in the seventh grade. Just a chapter a day while I was eating breakfast and God became real in my life.

¹⁵ Carson, p. 132.

There are 929 chapters in the Old Testament and 260 in the Old Testament. If you read three chapters a day from the OT and one chapter from the NT, you'll make it through the whole Bible in a year with days to spare. If you've never read through the NT, start there. Then add the OT next year. The Bible is God's self-revelation. If knowing Him is priority to you, then make reading His Word a top priority in 2011.

3. *Sacrifice your money for a specific purpose.* "Sacrifice" means we're giving up or denying ourselves something we have typically done in the past. Instead of merely spending your money in 2011, invest it for things above.

Start by giving the Lord the first portion of your paycheck, if you're not already. Then target a particular ministry for the year, such as The Union Mission, or Scioto Hills, or ACCG, or Sagar Island, or CRADLE, or the Baptist Children's Home. Make sure the ministry is gospel centered and local church focused.

In order to give, let's set a cap on our lifestyle. Resolve to live more frugally so you can give more generously. Eat out one less meal a week and brown bag it. Give up pop, drink water, and give the savings to a particular missionary.

4. *Spend your time in another context.* If we are in Christ, we have been saved to serve. And specifically, we're saved and gifted so we can serve in our local church. Nursery. Sunday School. Hospitality ministries. Counseling. Hospital visitation, etc.

This commitment assumes the above. This commitment is a call to go to another level, to another context. The church is not an end but a means. If all we do is serve in the context of our relationships with each other, how will we reach the multitudes in the world with whom we currently do not have a relationship? We need to reach out to lost people by coming out of our comfort zone and getting involved in *another context*.

For some, another context locally: with the homeless in Scioto County, or at the Union Mission; reaching the Hispanic population in our area; reaching non-churched elderly; hospice care; teaching English to internationals; helping drug addicts.

For others, another context internationally: A team from WBC is heading to Brazil next November; perhaps further involvement in the Sagar Island, or in Ukraine, or elsewhere.

The question is, what gifts and skills and experiences has the Lord given you that He desires to use in 2011 to bring the hope of Christ to hurting people in another context?

5. *Commit your life to a multiplying community.* Don't just go to church in 2011. Resolve to live your life in vital connection with your church this year. Take advantage of its ministries. Contribute to them. Look for ways to serve with your brothers and sisters in reaching the lost in this community and beyond.

I'd like to finish by praying for you. Because of the gospel I pray now with joy, thanksgiving, and affection. And this is my prayer...

*that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,
so that you may be able to discern what is best
and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,
filled with the fruit of righteousness,
that comes through Jesus Christ—
to the glory and praise of God.*