**Discerning What Is Best**

**The Word**

Read together Philippians 1:1-11

**The Big Idea**

Paul’s prayer is a very fitting new year’s prayer that we would grow in our ability to discern and love the things that truly matter in life so that we’ll be prepared for the day when Christ returns.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. As you come to the beginning of this new year, are there any specific goals (or themes or hopes or prayers) that you had already identified prior to Sunday that you want to pursue?

2. On Sunday it was stated that Philippians is about what it means to live “the Jesus life,” as opposed to a life of religion, spirituality, or church attendance. How did that distinction strike you? How do you think those two ways of life look different on the outside, and how do they feel different on the inside?

3. On Sunday we considered Paul’s prayer to “discern what is best” (NIV) and “to know what really matters” (NLT) from the perspective of the day of Christ. Accordingly, when we stand before Christ and consider our lives, some things we pursued in life will suddenly feel very unimportant and other things will feel very important. As you consider that perspective, does anything specific in your own life come to mind?

4. We also acknowledged that Paul’s prayer is not about simply being able to identify what is best but actually loving what is best. His prayer is ultimately a request that God would change our hearts so that we love and crave what is truly worth loving. As you consider praying this prayer for yourself, what specific things do you want God to give you a greater love for, and what things do you want him to give you a lesser love for in this new year?

5. Spend some time praying this prayer together. You might want to spend time slowly praying through each phrase of the prayer and expanding that as you feel led. Or you might spend time praying the prayer for various people in your lives (kids, friends, etc.).

**Digging Deeper: Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction to Philippians

A. The story of the founding of the church in Philippi is told in Acts 16.

B. Philippians paints a picture of the Jesus life

1. Paul is not interested in a life of religion or spirituality

2. Paul is interested in a person: Jesus. And this letter paints a picture of a life lived when a person truly grasps “the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus.” (3:8)

II. The Passage

A. Paul’s Greeting (v. 1-2)

1. Notice how thoroughly Jesus-centric the greeting is

B. Paul’s Thanksgiving (v. 3-8)

1. Philippians is Paul’s most affectionate letter

2. Notice the close bond he feels with the Philippians: I thank God (v. 3), I pray with “joy” (v. 4), I “have you in my heart (v. 7), I “long for you all” (v. 8).

3. The source of this bond is their “koinonia” (Greek) with Paul (v. 5 and 7)

Koinonia = partnership, fellowship, community, comradery

= all that we share in common in Christ: his grace, the goal of making him known, the struggles of following him in this world

4. Paul sees evidence of God’s work in their lives and is confident God will continue that work (v. 6)

C. Paul’s Prayer (v. 9-11)

1. That they would discern what really matters in life (v. 10)

a. The church in OC desperately needs this prayer. There are so many things vying for our attention, and we need discernment to identify what is most important and most valuable

2. Discerning what is best from the vantage point of the day of Christ (v. 10)

a. One day Christ will return, and when we look at our lives in that moment, we will have great clarity, and we’ll realize many things that seemed important at the time, weren’t important at all, and vice versa.

b. Paul is praying that we would have that clarity now

c. Analogy: Imagine if you could relive high school from a place of groundedness and identity, so that you could truly enjoy what there is to enjoy in high school but not worry about all the things High Schoolers worry about.

3. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus

a. Our lives can be so full of things today, but what we want is for our hearts to be full of righteousness (= Christ-like qualities, fruit of the Spirit)

4. And the prayer is not just that we could identify what is best, but that we would actually love what is best. V. 9 is about our love growing in knowledge and discernment

a. Analogy: As children we loved certain foods (candy), and as we mature we begin to love other foods (more substantial meals)

b. It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

–C.S. Lewis