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October 10, 2021

## PHILIPPIANS 1:7-11

Series: Choosing Joy in a Post-Traumatic World

Open your Bibles or your workbooks to Philippians 1:7-11. That's where we're going to be today. If you do not have a workbook, they are free. They're back on the back table there. We have extras and we'd love for you to have one so that you can take notes. Not only so you can take notes about the current time so you have the notes there for the study, but you can use this in the future when you can go back and look at here's what God was doing in my life during that time of my life. So it's a great little study in Philippians. I'll give you some things to actually write in your workbooks today as we go through and talk about this passage.

If you look with me at Philippians 1:7-11, you're going to see the first sentence. Let me read it to you. It says this: *It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart.* He's going to use this word *heart*, which is the word *kardia* in the Greek. The word *heart* is used 750 times in the Bible.

Now many years ago, Joanne Miller and I wanted to write a book on parenting. We recognized the heart was the key to reaching a child's life. Not just their behavior, but the heart. So we took the 750 times the word *heart* is used in the Bible and we compartmentalized them all. About 350 of those are all the physical heart of the body that we're not really interested in. That's like "the arrow went into his heart" kind of thing. And so we took those off the table. Then we still had about 400 verses. We actually took them and photocopied the Bible and we cut the verses and put them in piles so that we could figure out what the heart is. We identified nine functions of the heart by doing that. And that's how we created our book, *Parenting is Heart Work*. I just recommend the book. It's a great book. It's being used now in two seminaries as a textbook in their parenting program. But it's a book about the heart of a person. And the first two chapters are the biblical study of what the heart is.

Let me just summarize. Let's imagine your heart is a room and I'm going to take you into the room now. So let's go into the room, the heart room. Inside of the heart, we have these things. Over here in this corner of the room, we have desires. *Delight yourself in the Lord and he'll give you the desires of your heart.* So desires exist over here. They are those things that are raging out – I want, I want, I want. Feed me. You know, those kinds of things. Okay. That's what's going on in this part of our heart. Then in this part of our heart, we have our emotions. And those emotions are calling out, wanting us to do something. Then we have our beliefs. Not all the beliefs we have are true (believing something is true), but they are beliefs that we have. Like "if my brother's annoying, I have the right to punch him" kind of beliefs. You know. So those are beliefs we have in our heart. Then we have God's word in our heartbeat. Remember it says – *Hide God's word in your heart.* So we know God's word is there. And there are a bunch of other

things inside the heart, including Jesus Christ Himself. When you become a Christian, He comes in and organizes all this stuff inside of the room of your heart.

So imagine this room and all of these things are in there. Now there's some doors into the room, particularly the senses that you have, where you're gathering information and data. It comes in and it has to be sifted or sorted through this main CPU, this main operational principle, all these things that are going on. It has to pass through there and then it comes out in our behavior and our attitudes and so on. So the heart becomes a strategic place that we want to work.

Now today, we're going to work in the heart. This is the word that Paul is using here. Because we're particularly focused in on Paul's ability to be emotionally stable. I am just amazed at this guy, so strong in his ability to handle his emotions. So what we want to do is we want to figure out what is it that he is doing. He is doing some things that are strategic, and we want to be able to take those same ideas and apply them to our own lives so that we can be spiritually, emotionally, and mentally healthy. That's kind of the target I have. As I'm going through Philippians this time in my life, I'm applying it specifically to our own emotional, spiritual, and mental health, and our wellbeing. So we're going to look at what did Paul do in order to be that kind of a person that would be able to understand and process all of these things emotionally? Okay, that's where I'm headed here.

Now look at the passage because he says – *It is right for me to feel this way about you.* Now I've underlined the word *feel* there because that's the word *phroné*. Now the word *phroné* doesn't mean feel specifically, so let me expand it a bit. It means have a mindset towards something. See, if you have a mindset towards something, then you're going to feel something. Okay. So think in terms today of having a mindset regarding life.

Now Paul had a mindset regarding life. He was presently in part of the story when he's writing this, he is in Rome under house arrest. He could be feeling angry because he's being unjustly treated, misunderstood. He could be feeling sad because he wishes he could go to Spain to share the gospel, but he can't. He wishes that he could be sharing the gospel more, but he can't, so maybe he could be sad. He could feel anxious because he's actually going to face trial here and may actually be killed. But those aren't the things he focuses on. Because notice what he does. I want you to see what he does because we need to do the same thing in our own lives when we're starting to feel angry or sad or anxious. He says – *It is right for me to feel this way about you.* Notice, have this mindset about you. *I have you in my heart* is what he's saying.

So we want to think in terms of this idea of mindset, first of all. What kind of mindset can we have in our lives. This word mindset or *phroné*, *feel this way about you* is used twenty-six times in the New Testament, ten of them in the book of Philippians. This is a very important word in the book of Philippians.

Let me show you one in Philippians 3:19, the very same word, describing a mindset. Not believers, but this is a description of the mindset of nonbelievers. He says – *These are enemies of the cross of Christ, their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and their glory is their shame, with minds set on earthly things.* That's the same word, *phroné*. You see there's a mindset.

Now Paul is going to have a mindset. I think we need to start thinking more about the mindset that we have. I don't think you can live in today's world without doing some things proactively. Maybe you could have lived 100 years ago in this world and just kind of taken it as it goes, but not now. Not now. If you do not have a mindset that's moving in a particular direction, there's so much stuff swirling around that you're in trouble unless you have a plan, unless you're moving forward.

So notice there that Paul has this mindset. Let's go back to the passage there. He says – *because I hold you in my heart*. I hold you in my heart. This room of your heart has only so much space in it. You can only stuff so much stuff into your heart. When you start putting in too much you start feeling overwhelmed and you've got to start offloading things. You just can't keep it all in there. Or you start developing all kinds of things in your life because your heart is just too crammed full. So what happens is when you put some things in, other things get pushed out of the way. I think what gets pushed out of the way in Paul's life is the bad side of anger and sadness and anxiety. He pushes those things out because of some decisions that he makes. He says I'm going to have a mindset and I have you in my heart.

Think about the things you have in your heart. Now this first section that we're looking at is going to be about the feelings side of love. The last section is going to be about the deeper kind of love or the commitment kind of love. Sometimes in Christian circles we say there's a deeper love and feelings love; ignore the feelings love. I don't think we should ignore the feelings love. Paul doesn't. He's going to use that. He says, “I feel for you guys. I have you in my heart. And that's what I'm going to focus on instead of my imprisonment and my defense of the gospel.” That's what he's going to say. I'm not going to focus on those things. I'm going to focus on I love you guys. I have you in my heart.

He says – *I have you in my heart, for you are partakers with me of grace*. That next word we're going to head toward is this word *grace*. But he says *partakers*. That's your word *koinonia* that we talked about last week. *Koinonia*. You are partakers with grace.

So I imagine here this big table where we're all eating. And he has this big...what do you call that spinning thing on the on the table where you move it around so you can get the food? What's that called? Oh, Lazy Susan. Okay. So it's spinning around there and we all are partakers or eaters of that grace. So that's like the grace Lazy Susan. And so we spin it around, say, “I need some of that grace over there, would you pass it over? Because that's the particular kind I need right now in my life to deal with this problem or this person. I need that kind of grace.” And the other person saying, “Oh boy, pass it over here because I need some of that other grace.” And so this Lazy Susan has so much grace on it, we can't eat it all. We are fellow partakers in the grace. There's more than enough for everyone. You don't have to worry about running out. It's all there on this Lazy Susan and Paul is saying – *I have you in my heart. You're the partakers of this grace with me*. Do you see what he's saying? I know that I'm in this not by myself. That's one of the beautiful things about being part of a church. I'm not in this by myself. There are other people that are partakers with me of the grace. There's other people in my life that I can share (*koinonia*) the grace with that's going to help me. Wow.

Well he goes on. He says – *both in my imprisonment and the defense and confirmation of the gospel*. So he does have these things on his mind. He's imprisoned and he knows he has to defend the gospel as he's going forward. So they're weighing on him and he needs grace. And so he says, “Spin the Lazy Susan around here for me so I can pull off some grace for this problem I'm having or this thing I'm anticipating.” And God gives grace to us to be able to deal with the challenges we're facing. This is the confirmation of what God is doing in his life. That's verse 7.

Now verse 8 I want you to see the feeling words jump out of the passage here, because he's talking about his feelings for them. He says in verse 8 – *For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus*. The affection is as deep feeling that I have. See I think you can use the feelings you have, the love feelings you have. If you choose certain love feelings to put in your heart, then they'll help you in times when you experience your imprisonment or your defense of the gospel. We all have ways that that looks in our own lives. Whatever struggle you're facing that causes those emotions to creep into the room of your heart just to try to get you to feel overwhelmed, one of the ways that you can push those out is by having an ability to focus on what God is doing in your life and other people's lives. He says *I have you in my heart*. I think it's a strategy for dealing with negative emotions is to have something in your heart like this.

You know, this is what helps a mom, I think, who is working with her child who's rather challenged. And it's really tough, but she's focusing on the love that she has for this kid. If it was somebody else's kid, she'd say forget it, you know, but it's her kid and she loves this kid. She focuses in on the love that she has in her heart. Just think about that because if you're really struggling right now in an area of emotional distress, then one of the things you want to do is you want to have something that your love feelings can be pointed toward. Something like Paul is saying here. So the first thing we see here is that Paul is using the feeling part of love to help him deal with the challenges that he's facing.

But now let's go to the other kind of love. Let's go to the kind of love that we're going to see. I underlined the words *abound more and more*. But let's start at verse 9. It says – *And it is my prayer that your love (this is the word *agapé*) may abound more and more*. And here's why I think he's saying this, you have so much room in your heart, and only so much. If you have love in there and it abounds more and more, it pushes out some of the other stuff so that you can be an emotionally, spiritually, and mentally healthy person. You and I need that. Because there's stuff out there trying to creep in. And if the love is abounding more and more, then it's going to squeeze those things out. I would suggest today that we're going to see how love is an exercise. That if we exercise love in our lives, then it does something to us. Not just all the people that are going to be touched by us, but it does something to us in our own lives that we need.

He says – *I pray that your love will abound more and more*. Well the word *abound* is used several times in scripture. But let me tell you one that's really an interesting one, because it's used in the feeding of the five thousand in Matthew 14. You remember that story, right? The disciples did not do the miracle. It was Jesus who was doing the miracle, but the disciples got to be the grace partakers or the grace sharers, basically what they got to do. And I'm sure they got some praise for that. The people would be saying, “Oh you guys are so great. You have so much food for us.” They got some of the glory, I'm sure, for the miracle, although they didn't do the miracle. They were just the ones passing on the grace to other people. Jesus was doing the miracle. I think

Jesus chose to do the miracle in their lives so that they could be part of it. He could have just said, “Everybody stand back. Manna is coming down from heaven.” Like in the Old Testament, everybody can pick up their own. He doesn't do that. But He uses these twelve guys, and He says, “You guys have them sit down in fifties and hundreds, and you come up here and you get the food, and you go take it to everyone.” That's how I feel like I am in life. I hope you feel that way too. You're passing out the grace. Other people need it. We're not the miracle providers; we're the ones giving people the miracle of Jesus. And so we're sharing it with other people.

Well here's what word is used. So at the end of this whole miracle, they go around afterwards for some reason I don't know why. Maybe He just says, “Okay guys, go collect all the leftovers.” I don't know why He does that. They go and they find twelve baskets full of leftovers. They started with five loaves and two fish. They ended up with twelve baskets full. I think because there were twelve disciples you have twelve baskets full. So that all those disciples could say, “Wow, there's so much leftovers that (what's your word here) abound. There's so much leftovers in this that I get my own too.” It's not just about passing on the grace to other people. It's not just about exercising love so other people get it. It is about something that happens to me. I get the leftovers. And when God is doing the love, the miracle in my life and I share it with others, it blesses me and it expands more and more. Leftover so much that I get the leftovers and I can share the leftovers. It is brimming over. That's what abound means.

What a beautiful picture that Paul is saying. I pray for you guys. He says, “I just pray for you that your love will have leftovers you'll have so much in your life.” Just a beautiful picture that he has there.

Now this love you have to see is not a feelings kind of love. This love is accompanied by two words. Notice the two words, *with knowledge and discernment*, in verse 9. *With knowledge and discernment*. Notice I underlined those. Now knowledge is like truth, and discernment is wisdom. So you got knowledge and wisdom, two important words, that our love must have. If you just have truth and you don't have wisdom, you're in trouble because you're right, but you're not wise. It's not good enough to be right. We must also be wise. Otherwise what happens? You have the truth, you go, “I've got the truth. And I'm going to let you know.” And so you end up offending people or hurting people because you're not wise. So this love that you have needs to be accompanied by two things, he says, knowledge and wisdom.

This is a very important truth. I'm going to pause here for just a moment. Because in our world today, there is a misunderstanding of love. There are people today who believe that my experience determines what truth is. In other words, if I feel something then that makes it true. If I feel like I'm a woman today, then I'm a woman. Okay. That's an example of this idea that if I feel something then it's true.

But let's take it into our Christian community just for a minute, because I think that sometimes we do the same thing. If I were to say to you, a group of 100 Christians, “How many of you believe that the Bible is true?” If you're Christians, everybody's going to raise their hand. Yes, I believe the Bible is true. Then I ask you this question: “How many of you believe that the Bible is true for everyone, even people who grew up in a different culture or something else?” Do you know that less people are going to raise their hand? Because there's some people who believe

that it's only true for me because of my experience, and that that person had a different experience so it may not be true for them. Here's how it comes out in the Christian community. You're sitting around and some Christian says, "Well here's what I believe." They say that in such a way as if to say "if I believe it, it must be true." That is not how we want to look at truth. We want to say, "If it's true, I want to believe in it." Do you see the difference between that? Some people say, "Well, if I believe it... Here's what I believe. I'll tell you what I believe," as if that's true. That is not how we want to come to truth.

Paul did not believe that "Well your faith is okay. Now if you grew up in a different way, then you can have faith in whatever you had faith in. And I'm a Christian, and I want to tell you about Christianity. But it's true for me and I'd like it to be true for you." That's not what he's saying. He's saying, "There's truth in the gospel. You must have it." That's why Paul is eager to go to Spain. That's why he's planting churches all over the place, because he knows there is what we call absolute truth. You cannot say, we cannot say as Christians, "Let me tell you what I believe," unless that belief is tied into the truth. And so sometimes I would suggest some of the things we believe are actually wrong. We must be able to look at God's word because it is the standard, not my experience when it comes to living life. Okay. So I just want to make sure we understand that because this is a very important aspect of truth. And when we have it, it takes us somewhere.

Notice where it takes us. It says – *so that you may approve what is excellent*. Now this approving what is excellent is going to be very important for your heart. So in your heart, you're bombarded (like I am) with all kinds of stuff. So all kinds of things are coming at me in my heart all the time. I don't think as Christians, at least for most of us as Christians, we're not wrestling against evil. Good and evil. It's not the evil things that are going to take over my time or they're going to distract me from what I'm trying to do. It's not the evil, because I already made decisions about evil. I don't want evil. It's the good things that get in the way of the excellent things. There are so many good things today. And if I open my heart to all the good things that are coming in, I miss the excellent. Paul is saying if you have a love that's tied into knowledge and discernment, that's based in truth, you're going to be able to tell what the excellent things are. And those excellent things are going to help you in your heart. Notice he goes on to describe them.

See there are some people in their heart, here's what they do. "Well, you know, I know I want to be a Christian, I like all these things about God, but I'm going to have this little closet over here in my heart of these things that I really know God doesn't like, but I want to do it anyway because this is me." You know, it's all about me. You know, I want to have a little bit of this in my life. And so whatever it is, they put in the closet and they shut the door as if God can't see it. The problem is that that starts to mess with you in a way that damages your heart. It's in your heart. So it starts to create some problems. And that's why he goes on and he says – *so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ*. You see there's a purity that takes place when you have this love that's abounding in knowledge and truth, and the excellent things that are there. And it leads to this: *filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God*.

Wow. That is a passage that is so powerful because it's talking about love and, I would suggest, exercising love in our hearts in order to overcome many of the challenges that we face in our lives.

So I think we have to ask the question, how do you exercise love? We don't usually think about it in those terms. We usually think of love in a cultural way, which is something you feel. And if I don't feel it, then I shouldn't have to do it or something like that. But what we're talking about here is a love that is something you can exercise in your heart. So I would suggest that many of us need to add this tool into our lives when we start to feel those feelings of anger and sadness and anxiety start to creep in and ruin us, damage us. That God would say, "Hey, get on your exercise program here." Last week, you remember we talked about one exercise strategy that was so valuable. It's about how thankfulness helps us have selective memory. Because sometimes our memories from the past create problems in the present with these emotions. God wants to heal us of that, heal us of the memories, and He does that in part through the exercise of thankfulness.

So he says – *I thank my God every time I remember you. In all things...* You know he uses the word *all* and *every* three times back there in verse 3. So we see that thankfulness becomes one of these tools that we exercise in our hearts in order to help us to be emotionally, spiritually, and mentally healthy in our lives.

The same thing is true with love. We need to exercise it. I know you're asking the question, "Okay, how do I exercise love?" I'm going to show you in a moment how we exercise love. But first let me show you what happens when you do it to your heart. Okay, let's just go to these next several verses.

In 1 Peter 4:8, Peter describes it this way. He says – *Love each other deeply*. So he's not talking about abounding more and more. He's saying make it really deep that you love each other. Why? *Because love covers over a multitude of sins*. Wow. Love when exercised pushes out the anger, the resentment, the bitterness that comes from your sins and the sins of other people toward you. That's what he's saying. Love is a powerful exercise tool.

Jesus said, remember – *Love your enemies*. I don't think that means feel attracted to them. I think what that means is exercise love when you see someone that's really classified like an enemy in your life. Practice it.

When Peter came to Jesus and said, "How many times should I forgive this person? Seven times?" probably boasting and saying that's a lot, man. Seven times? Like who would forgive someone seven times? And Jesus' response is, "No, let's try seventy times seven." In other words, let's make this a lifestyle. Let's practice forgiveness. Let's practice love in a way that does something for you. See, I'm convinced that when we love our enemies, when we practice forgiveness, that it doesn't just do something for the other person. It does something for our own hearts, which tend, I think, to be cramped by anger and sadness and anxiety. We've got to exercise because when we don't, the flabby things start happening in our bodies and in our spiritual lives. And we start experiencing the damage that takes place. We have to be exercising. Love is one of those exercises that we do.

Notice that in 1 John 4:18 it even says this. It says – *There is no fear in love; but perfect love drives out fear.* So if you're building this love, you receive the perfect love from God. He loves your whole heart. He loves you. He loves everything about you. And He now is helping you to grow. So you're kind of exercising this love and loving other people. It pushes out stuff. It pushes out, in this case, the fear that can be a problem.

Okay. I like it. What it does there? But what am I supposed to do this week if I'm going to exercise love? Well, 1 Corinthians 13 tells us two things. That's this next passage. Just two things there are the exercises of love. Here's what you can do when you leave. Patient. *Love is patient and love is kind.* Patience is when those things are coming at you, how are you going to respond? You want to respond with patience. But that's not the only kind of love you have is to put up with people and to be patient with them. You also want to have that love that is proactive, that's kind. It's going out. So patient is receiving; kindness is giving. Are you seeing that? Patience is your ability to take on the stuff that people have. And kindness is the ability to give out. There's only two things in 1 Corinthians 13 here in this love chapter that are the exercises. The other seven things that I'm going to read here are the things that get pushed out. When you have love, then this is what happens. *It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no account of wrongs.*

So the more I study this idea of anger and love, I see that they're on a continuum. That if you have anger over here, and you're trying to get rid of it, what you want is the love that's over here. Because love is what's going to help you not be easily angered. And the more angry you are, the less loving you can be. Because you're easily tripped up, you're easily incited, you're easily triggered to reactions in your life. You want to have less anger in your life? I'm not sure the solution is have an anger management plan. Although that's probably good trying to contain this anger over here. I think the solution is practice love. When you practice love, anger reduces because it's on this continuum. So if you have this problem with anger in your life, the solution is going to be love exercises. To be patient and to be kind. Those are the things that are being talked about here.

I just find this to be such a practical piece of scripture as we look at Paul. Because Paul could be all upset there in Rome about what's happening, but he isn't. Philippians is the book of the New Testament that's the most emotional of all the books. So as we see Paul expose himself emotionally, we see what he says, we can learn from his example, we can learn from what's going on, and we can apply it to our lives. I think we need to come to the Lord and say, “Lord, we need more love. Lord, help me to exercise that love.” You know if I want to have more muscles, I'm going to exercise them. “Lord, I need more love.” And God says, “Okay. I'm not just going to hand it to you. You need to exercise it. Receive the love I want to give you and exercise it into your heart so that it abounds more and more, it expands more and more into the room so the other stuff can't stay there. Love. Practice love in your life.” I need more of God. I need more of more love. I need more of God's power in my life. That's what I need.

So I encourage you, go out of this place this week to practice. What are your two words? How are you going to practice it? What are they? Patience and kindness. That is the feet on the ground, rubber meets the road activity that you practice this week. Yes, it's going to abound love more and more in your heart, but here's how you do it. 1 Corinthians tells us go out and be

patient and kind with people and it's going to do something to you inside. I can hardly wait to hear the testimonies of what God is doing in your heart because of His grace working in your life, then you get all the leftovers the abounding of love inside of your heart. It's going to be great. Are you looking forward to this week? No? Come on. Are you looking forward to this week? Let's get out there and practice love. Can we?

Stand with me and let's ask God:

[PRAYER] Lord, give us more of this. We want more love in our lives. We need more of you, more of your grace. And so, Father, we just ask you to work in our hearts in a powerful way today. In Jesus' name, amen.