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## More

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### Philippians 1:9

[Paul is writing to the members of the Christian Church in Philippi:]

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment...

A man and his grandson were taking a walk in the woods. The little boy saw a small turtle crawling slowly through the grass.

The little boy did what little boys do. He stooped over and picked up the turtle.

The turtle did what turtles do. It pulled its head and legs back inside its shell.

The little boy didn't like that one bit. He looked up at his grandfather and demanded, "Make him come out of his shell!"

The grandfather said, "Let's just take him home. When he gets comfortable with us, he'll come out of his shell."

That's what they did. They took the turtle home with them. When they got home, the grandfather put the turtle down on the hearth of the fireplace, right next to a roaring fire. Sure enough, it didn't take long before that turtle poked his head and legs out of its shell and started crawling away.

"Just look at that," grandfather said, "that old turtle just got scared when you picked him up. But look at him now. All you had to do was warm him up with a little love."

Warm him up with a little love...  
it works for turtles,

and it'll work for people, too.  
 If you want people to feel right at home,  
 if you want them to feel safe and secure,  
 if you want them to be comfortable around you...  
 warm 'em up with a little love.

Later on this week, we're going to celebrate the day that has been set aside right here in the United States, and in much of the Western World - we're going to celebrate Valentine's Day. It's a day for "love."

So, we decorate our homes and stores with red hearts and Cupids. We give our loved ones flowers and candy. We send cards. We exchange hugs and kisses. We smile and talk about love.

And those husbands and boyfriends who know better - they know they better make a trip to a jewelry store.

This coming Tuesday is Valentine's Day in America. It's a day for "love."

And if there is anything that this weary old world needs right now, it's more love!

This world needs...  
 more love between husbands and wives...  
 more love among parents and children...  
 more love in our neighborhoods and schools.

You know this world needs...  
 more love in our work places and along our highways...  
 more love among the nations and people at war...  
 more love among our different religious sects...  
 more love!

Don't get me wrong. I'm not talking about romantic love, although that's very nice. I'm talking about -

- the kind of love that expresses itself through caring acts,
- the kind of love that wants the best for other people,
- the kind of love that's gentle and kind, thoughtful and giving,
- the kind of love that forgives and forgets and understands.

I bet you could use some of that kind of love right about now. I bet you could use -

- a love that opens some door which had been slammed shut,

- a love that shines light on a gloomy situation,
- a love that builds hope when the clouds of despair have descended.

That's the kind of love the Apostle Paul was talking about when he wrote his letter to the Philippians. He knew that was the kind of love he needed in his personal life, and he wanted his friends to enjoy that same kind of love.

Paul loved his friends in the church in Philippi. He had founded that church about ten years before this particular letter was written. And throughout those intervening ten years, even from a distance, Paul had kept a close eye on his brothers and sisters in that church in Philippi.

Paul had a group of friends who acted as his eyes and ears throughout the Mediterranean world. His friends and protégés would report back to him what they saw. When Paul got the reports back from his correspondents in Philippi, Paul liked what he heard.

He liked it when he heard that the church in Philippi was growing and prospering.

He liked hearing that the congregation there was reaching out to more and more people.

He liked hearing that the Philippians were loving each other with a strong Christian affection.

Paul liked hearing all that good news about the church in Philippi, and he wanted to congratulate the people for doing such great work in the name of Christ. He wanted to send them a message, encouraging them to keep it up. That's why he began this letter to them by writing, "it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more..."

He wanted them to have "more love."

I think almost everybody in this room would agree: more love is a good thing. Love is something you can never have too much of. Everybody wants more of it.

It was this passage of scripture, Philippians 1:9, which inspired a woman by the name of Elizabeth Printiss to write a beautiful little hymn called, "More Love to Thee, O Christ."

Here on this Sunday before Valentine's Day, I want you all to hear that hymn. Lois Newman will now sing for you the first two verses.

"More love to Thee, O Christ, More love to Thee!

Hear Thou the prayer I make On bended knee;  
 This is my earnest plea: More love, O Christ, to Thee,  
 More love to Thee, More love to Thee!

“Once earthly joy I craved, Sought peace and rest;  
 Now Thee alone I seek, Give what is best;  
 This all my prayer shall be: More love, O Christ, to Thee;  
 More love to Thee, More love to Thee!”

It’s an interesting story how she came to write this hymn.

It all started out with Elizabeth living a blessed and sweet life. She and her husband, George, were living in New York City in the mid 1800’s. Together they had three small children. They were wealthy. They were a happy family. Life was sweet and kind.

“Once earthly joy I craved, sought peace and rest,” Elizabeth wrote. Earthly joy is what she wanted:

She wanted a husband who was successful in business.

She wanted a fine home.

She wanted to wear the newest fashions imported from Europe.

She wanted the best money could buy.

She wanted her children to be healthy and happy.

Those are the things she wanted.

She called them her “earthly joys.”

And, that’s what she had.

She didn’t want trouble. She didn’t want sorrow. She didn’t want any problems to interrupt her sweet life. She wrote that earthly joy was what she craved.

I reckon some of you can identify with what Elizabeth wanted out of life. I reckon some of you have the kind of life Elizabeth had - a sweet, happy, full life; a life of blessings, a life filled with earthly joys. That’s a good life to have.

But then, the year 1850 unfolded. Elizabeth’s second child took sick and died. Just months after the death of her second child, her youngest child took sick and died. Before the year 1850 finished out, all of Elizabeth’s earthly joys had turned to sorrows. Her peace was shattered. She found no rest. Elizabeth was inconsolable.

After the death of her youngest child, she wrote in her diary, “One child and two green graves are mine, this is God’s gift to me; a bleeding, fainting, broken heart, this is my gift to Thee.”

All of the earthly joys she had craved turned into bitterness and anger toward God for allowing these tragedies to happen.

Following the deaths of two of her three children, the days turned into weeks, the weeks into months; and Elizabeth began the process of working through her grief. As she read the stories of Jacob in the Old Testament, she began to see how God had continued to meet Jacob in a special way during every moment of sorrow and deepest need.

She came to understand that God is present in the bad days, just as He is present on the happy days.

Before, she had always known that God was with her at the birth of her children; now, she understood that God was there beside her even as she stood at the gravesides of her dead children.

Before, she only thought that God was with her when she was showered with earthly blessings; now, she realized that God was with her all the time, in every circumstance; and God’s gift to her was a special kind of love, a special love fashioned to meet the needs of every particular day.

Through Bible study, she rediscovered the love of God on the pages of scripture. This is what helped her work through her grief.

One evening, after having read Paul’s letter to the Philippians, Elizabeth sat down and wrote this hymn. She wrote it as a gift to herself: a gift to remind her of how she had worked through her personal tragedy to find “peace and rest.”

She wrote it because she knew that more love was what she needed so desperately.

I suspect it’s what you need, too. It’s what you need to receive, and it’s what you need to give.

In this fast-paced society, you sometimes just don’t take the time to show your love to the people you love the most. How many times have you heard it said:

“As soon as we get into that new house, then we’ll have some quality family time together...”

“As soon as the pressure on my job eases up a bit, then we’ll be able to go on vacation...”

“As soon as we retire, then, we’ll be able to spend time together...”

“I really want to do it, but I can’t, not right now, because I’m too busy... maybe later?”

It is a sad commentary on modern life because for so many people, the chance to do something later never materializes, and the time to love never comes.

But what you need most right now is to make the time to share more love. You don’t need a new house. You don’t need a better job. You don’t need to wait for retirement. You need more love right now. And if you’re a loving person, you’ll make time for love.

Back when my daughter entered adolescence, the two of us just didn’t get along. Now-a-days, my daughter often jokes that I was a much better father to her brother than I was to her. There are almost seven years difference in age between them. Jennifer was my first child. I didn’t know how to be a father. I joke with her that she was my experimental child. I made my mistakes on her; but at least I learned from those mistakes and really was a better father to her younger brother.

Nevertheless, I remember having an argument with Jennifer one day. I don’t remember what it was about, but it ended up with Jennifer slamming the door to her room. We ended up as armed camps, enemies brooding in isolation, probably planning the strategies for our next attack on the other.

Finally, I came to my senses and realized that I was supposed to be the adult in that relationship, and I was supposed to take the lead. So, I went to my daughter with a few tender words of reconciliation and love.

A little while later, Jennifer appeared at my side. Without speaking, she handed me a little piece of paper. It was about two inches square. Written on that little piece of paper were six words. In a tiny little print, Jennifer had written, “Dad, I love you, too. Jen.”

I kept that piece of paper with me for all the rest of her growing-up years. I had the need to pull it out of my wallet and read it over on several occasions. It was a symbol of my daughter’s love, and I read it on the bad days. And it reminded me that even then, her love remains.

I want you all to realize the power little acts of love can have - a tiny note, a phone call, a helping hand, a shoulder to cry on, a few words of forgiveness, a smile.

Every one of you needs more of those powerful little acts of love every day!

A nurse got stuck with a very contrary patient. He was mean. He was nasty. He was hard to work with. He was just plain sour on life. He never had a good word to say. He also wasn't progressing very well. He wasn't healing the way he should.

One day the nurse said to him, "You need help to get well, and the best help you can get is by praying."

She told him, "Use the fingers on your hand to help you pray. The thumb reminds you to pray for the people nearest and dearest to you, since it is the finger closest to your body. The index finger reminds you to pray for those who 'pointed fingers' at you and taught you great lessons in life, people like your parents and teachers. The middle finger is the longest and reminds you to pray for those who stand tallest in society, people like our elected officials. The ring finger is the weakest, and it reminds you to pray for those who are in trouble or in pain. And the little finger is the smallest, reminding you to pray for children and all the forgotten people in our society.

"And after you have prayed for all of them," she said, "then ask God to heal you and make you better."

Every morning when the nurse arrived, she asked her patient if he remembered his prayers. He surprised her every morning by saying "yes."

Over the next few weeks something amazing happened. The man's body healed, and his soul had been transformed.

It's the power of love, the power of caring, the power of reaching out to other people - it can transform a hardened, ugly, pessimistic person into a loving child of God. This world needs more of that!

Elizabeth's hymn sings about the power of love. Listen to the third verse.

"Then shall my every breath Sing out Your praise;  
This be the only song My heart shall raise;  
This still my prayer shall be: More love, O Christ, to Thee  
More love to Thee, More love to Thee!"

Those aren't the words Elizabeth wrote. The compilers of our hymnal decided to change the words. I figure they wanted to make the

words more contemporary. They wanted the words to have more meaning. But, I want you to hear the words Elizabeth wrote.

“Then shall my latest breath whisper Thy praise.  
This be the parting cry, my heart shall raise.”

Elizabeth wrote about her “parting cry.” I’m not sure what she meant, but I suspect she was talking about her “last words.” I think she was writing about death, and what a person leaves behind.

What last words are going to be said about you? What will people say about you?

Will they say that you were difficult and cranky?

Will they mention that you always whined about your bad luck?

Will they remember the way you enjoyed gossip?

Will they reminisce about how self-centered you were?

Do you think they will care when you’re no longer here?

Or, will people say something different about you?

Will they say that you were a fine and gentle person?

Will they mention how you always brought peace and harmony?

Will they remember how dependable you were?

Will they reminisce about the way you brought laughter with you, and how your smile brightened their days?

Do you think they will miss your love when you’re gone?

What do you think? How will you be remembered? Or, in Elizabeth’s words, what will be your “parting cry” as you leave this earth?

When you part, you leave it all behind. Everything you cherish on this earth will either wear out or grow old - fall apart or decay. There’s only one thing you carry with you into eternity, and that’s the Love of Christ.

The prison chaplain saw the same old man in the waiting room every visiting day. Week after week, month after month, year after year; that old man showed up at the prison on visiting day.

Every visiting day, the guard would send the message back into the prison cells that the old man was there, waiting to see his son. Every visiting day, the same message would return: the son refused to see his father. “I won’t go see that old man,” the prisoner-son said.

With that news, the old man would thank the guard for his trouble, put on his hat, pick up his packages, and leave the prison. But the next visiting day, the old man would be right back there again.

After witnessing this same old scenario for a couple of years, the prison chaplain went over to the old man following the latest rejection, and asked, “Why do you keep coming back? Your son simply refuses to see you.”

And the old man said, “I don’t care if he rejects me ten thousand visiting days in a row. I’m going to keep coming back, because some day, some one of these days, he’ll change his mind and let me love him.”

That’s the kind of love God has for you. Don’t you want more of it? You can reject God’s invitation ten thousand times in a row, but He’ll keep coming back for you.

Valentine’s Day is coming up.

Isn’t it about time you accepted the love that’s offered?

Isn’t it about time you started sharing the love you’ve got?

Because it’s more love you need, not less!

Thanks be to God; He keeps coming back.

Thanks be to God;

He keeps showing you the way to more!