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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**God Wastes Nothing**

**Philippians 1:12-17**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just thank you for who you are. We thank you for the grace that you have bestowed on us as a church, that you just continue to empower us, you continue to keep us going, and I just praise you and thank you for that. We thank you also for the gift of your word, Lord, the gift of your Holy Spirit. We just continue to pray as we're going to unpack both of those gifts this morning, we pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, we pray that you would make this of lasting value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are looking at the Philippian church, we're looking at Paul's letter to this church and he's writing it sitting in a prison cell in Rome and he's joyfully considering his brothers and sisters in the church at Philippi and he commends them for the work that he sees God doing in their lives. He says: *I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* He commends the love that he sees expressed by the Philippians as a love that is properly

bound by knowledge and discernment and he prays, he prays that that love will grow. He says this: *And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

Now you have to remember Paul is writing this from the foul stench of a Roman dungeon. As I pointed out last time, I said there's a principle at work here. You see life for all of us will consist of difficult times, times when we're challenged by circumstance to believe that God really does love and really does care for us. And every time that we're challenged like that, we face what the scripture describes as a binary choice. There really is only two different ways that you can go. There's a grace direction or there's a bitterness direction. *Hebrews 12:15 says: Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and by it, defiling many.* Well Paul clearly and obviously opted for grace instead of bitterness and it made all of the difference in his life. Paul was able to maintain this split screen vision of life as he lived it. And he lived a split screen life and his two screens consisted of the life that he was living here on earth and the life that he saw

that was waiting for him in eternity. And that life in eternity was so real, it was so present that it allowed him to look straight through circumstances that were truly awful to see a future that was so bright that nothing could dim it. And the reason why Paul was able to do that was that he realized a principle that radically enabled him to ignore -- quote -- "wasting his life away in a Roman prison," and it was that God wastes nothing. I mean we are incredibly wasteful people. We waste our time, we waste our energy, we waste our resources. God wastes nothing. We often repeat *Romans 8:28*: *We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.* And what we don't really grasp is what Paul instinctively knew. He knew that "all things" really does mean all things, and that "all things" means much more than we think it means. And what it means is that God uses good things and he uses bad things, all things that happen in our lives to shape and mold us into the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. You know we can all nod in agreement at that statement but I don't think we understand what a really big deal that is. I mean what if God is far, far bigger than you and I can even imagine. And what if he does really love us so much so that he numbers even the hairs on our head. And what if we're so precious to God that he records each and every one of our struggles so that he can use those struggles to bless us. What if God knew and cared each and every time you tossed and turned on

our bed wondering how tomorrow's going to turn out. Well, it turns out that God does care. When David was captured by the Philistines he had this very same attitude that Paul had of recognizing that every single thing that happened in his life was God-ordained and that God wastes nothing including the very tears that he shed. David said in *Psalm 56*: *You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?* See, Paul had the very same attitude and it wasn't wishful thinking. It was simply trusting in a God who was far, far bigger than the God that we often think of, a God who wastes absolutely nothing. That's why Paul was able to endure this, this seeming waste of being stuck in a Roman prison cell. Listen to how Paul describes this attitude in *2 Corinthians 4*. He says this: *Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* I think it's that last statement that so often entraps us. He says: For what is seen, what you can see with your own eyes is temporary, what is unseen is eternal. We get caught up so much so in the temporary in our present day moment by moment circumstance that we lose sight of what really matters. And what really matters is what Paul saw with crystal clarity, and it was the kingdom of God.

I mean this past week all anybody could talk about, all anybody could think about what the presidential debate, as if that's going to matter a thousand years from now. If the world is still here 3020, do you think that anybody's going to care about the Trump-Biden campaign? I mean it's going to become some tiny little footnote in some obscure historian's recollection of 2020. It's going to be the same way that we look at the big news of what was happening in 1020. But understand how things work in the kingdom. There everything you do, everything you do doesn't just have temporary meaning, it has permanent meaning and permanent reward. Jesus once said in *Matthew 10*, he said: *"Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he's a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."* Jesus is focusing on something of absolute insignificance. He's talking about a cup of water. And he says that to claim that any and all significance comes not from the seen world but from the present day unseen kingdom of God and that even a tiny effort in that direction will never go without an eternal reward. And Paul absolutely buys into that concept. And because he accepts that as his reality, he may well be sitting in a jail cell but he's absolutely confident that that's where God would have him and that even his jail cell is now a place of great significance. And Paul knows that he's dealing with a God who takes something bad and can literally turn it inside out.

If you notice that Corinthian passage has four different sets of opposites and they all have to do with how God takes bad things and uses them in a way to bring out our good and his glory. Paul's giving us a practical application of how all things really do work together for good so that nothing undertaken in the kingdom never amounts -- amounts to nothing. It always amounts to something. Everything has meaning. First Paul acknowledges that while his outer person may be being destroyed, the opposite is happening to his inner person; that person is being renewed. God's not about to let a single struggle of anyone he loves as dearly as Paul go to waste. He's going to squeeze every possible good thing that he can out of it.

And secondly we say, okay, how? Paul tells us that the affliction he's under is producing an equal and opposite weight of glory. It's kind of like the mantra that everybody understands with regard to physical exercise, it says, "No pain, no gain." Paul is telling us that God wastes nothing in the affliction that he's suffering because every ounce of affliction is going to produce pounds of an eternal weight of glory. In other words the pain that he's experiencing is not just producing ordinary gain, it's producing eternal gain because God wastes nothing.

And thirdly, Paul tells us that he refuses to focus on what is seen

and what is obvious because what is seen and what is obvious is exactly what the enemy wants to use to discourage us. I mean think about it. When things are going well, we don't normally question God. I mean we just accept that this is part of his blessing. And it's only when things start to go south that we start to ask God why God, why are you allowing this to happen in my life? Well, things aren't exactly going well for Paul. I mean right now he's sitting in a cold, dark Roman dungeon. And there's lots of folks, most likely many of them in the Philippian church who are wondering why in the world would God allow this to happen to Paul? So Paul tells us fourthly and finally that those seen and those obvious things like Roman dungeons are short-lived while unseen things, the unseen things that they're producing, they go on forever. That's how Paul was able to handle the stresses in his life. And having commended the Philippians for exercising a love bounded by knowledge and discernment, he then applies the very same standards that he laid out in 1 Corinthians to his own circumstances while he's sitting there in a Roman jail. He's saying that because he wants the Philippians to think like he thinks. He wants them to see the world through the same split screen vision that he has. It's a vision that links everything to God's sovereign control and this divine determination to make every single thing that happens in his life work together for good. But we look at the scripture and quite frankly his first statement on the surface seems absurd.

Listen to what Paul is saying. This is verse 12. He says: *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me -- he's sitting in jail -- I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.* Really, Paul? Well let me tell you what we can see. We can see that you're not training people, we can see that you're not teaching, we can see that you're not preaching, we can see that you're sitting in a jail cell. So how in the world could that serve to advance the gospel? How is that not a complete waste? Well, first and foremost and the most obvious thing is the book of Philippians. It was written from that same jail cell. But Paul sees other blessings as well. Paul sees right off the bat that his time in this Roman jail has dividends that at this point only he can see and he goes on to explain in verse 12, he says this, he says: *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.* You see Paul's prison cell may have been dank and dark and disgusting but something unique and wonderful was happening while he was sitting there. I mean because he was stuck there, he had ample time to get into conversations with people who are in a position to take his gospel throughout the rest of the empire. It just happened to be prison guards. Because Paul was a very important prisoner, he happened to get not just any prison guard



but the imperial guard to watch over him. And as *Baker's New Testament Commentary* put it, it says when Paul went to Rome, the gospel went to Rome. Because Paul understood that God wastes nothing. And because he had that attitude he understood more than a few things from God's perspective instead of from man's. You see, Paul's knowledge of scripture and God's history with Israel gave him the ability to see his circumstances through a much larger lens than only what is seen and what is temporary. Sitting in that dungeon may well have reminded Paul of the days of Joseph wasting his life away in an Egyptian dungeon accused of rape. Paul knew that in the end it wasn't waste at all. He knew that it was all part of God's plan to establish the Jewish people in Egypt. He could have looked back at all the patriarchs and seen the hand of God working through their struggles as they advanced the nation of Israel. But now he sees that very same hand and it's working in his life. And the first thing he sees is this gospel inexorably working its way into some very hard-hearted Gentiles in the Roman army. But secondly he sees another great benefit. He says: *And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.* You've got to remember who he is, who is speaking and who he is speaking to. I mean this is Paul. This is the guy who once held the witness's cloaks as they stoned Stephen to death. And he's writing to people wondering why God would allow such a fate to

befall him. And sitting in a Roman jail cell Paul has lots of time to reflect back on who he was before his conversion and how God was able to make all things, including the terrible things that Paul had done, to make them work together for good.

One of the worst things was Paul's participation in Stephen's execution. Stephen was the very first Christian martyr. He was the very first person who actually really did speak truth to power. He told the Jewish religious elites, the ones that were responsible for Jesus' execution that they were stiff-necked rebels who constantly resisted the Holy Spirit, and he paid for that with his life. Paul was a willing participant in his murder. And Paul could have easily recalled Stephen's lengthy account that he gave before the scribes and the elders of God's miraculously sovereign power, of how God miraculously called Abraham and the patriarchs and how he raised up Joseph and how God miraculously put him at the head of Egypt and how he raised up Moses and brought his people out of Egypt. Stephen winds up giving a whole mini history lesson of how God raised up the nation of Israel and how terribly its current leaders had failed and he ends it with this damning statement in *Acts 7:53*, he says: *"You who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."* Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and

*Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. That young man was Paul, who before his conversion was the same Saul who hated the gospel and helped to execute Stephen for preaching it. And it was Saul who was breathing out threats and murder thinking he was protecting his Jewish faith. He saw firsthand, firsthand how nothing launched against God and his kingdom will ever prevail.*

It's now been many years since Saul's been knocked off his horse by a bolt of lightning and miraculously converted. Saul is now Paul and now he's on trial for his life because of the very same gospel. He knew that right after Stephen's execution the church had come under this huge amount of persecution but he also saw that instead of wiping it out, it simply scattered it throughout the whole Roman empire and eventually into Europe itself. Paul knew that he was now himself part of that whole process. And he had seen once again that God wastes nothing, that God is quite capable of turning what the enemy does inside out. And so he sees now how his imprisonment is fitting into God's great plan, and part of that plan was to turn the imprisonment itself inside out. And sure enough, sitting in

that prison cell he's inspiring others to speak the word without fear. And it's not because they think they can escape Paul's fate, it's because they know that there's a God empowering Paul who can also empower them. He says: *And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.* Paul knew the Philippians were being emboldened and encouraged not by his imprisonment, but by what he was doing with it. We think of the word "encouragement" as giving somebody hope, giving somebody support, but that's not really what the word means. The word really means to fill somebody up with courage, to encourage them. That's precisely what Paul was doing. And I wonder if we realize how easy it is for us to sow either encouragement or discouragement in the very same way.

I look back at a little bit of history myself, I look back at this church. I can think of at least a half a dozen who have gone on to heaven who while they were among us did their very best to spread encouragement just like Paul did. And they did it not by celebrating how they were able to avoid difficulties but by proclaiming that right in the center of their own personal storms they could feel, they could sense, they could know God's power and provision. I think of folks like Rosie Zaorski and Donna Tetter who both struggled with awful diseases, and they were able by God's grace to demonstrate God's power to lead them through the deepest

of valleys. I mean I think of Bob and Helen Sorensen and Bertha Moore and Jean Warner and so many others who've gone ahead of us who showed us exactly what Paul was talking about. And again, that's just one of the reasons why this body of Christ is so important. It's one of the reasons why long range Christians deny themselves the privilege by not being part of a body. I mean, have you ever encouraged a brother or sister in Christ? Have you ever encouraged a brother or sister or for that matter anyone with the gospel of Christ? You see, you have to understand, your struggle's not limited to yourself, you are part of something bigger, you are part of the body of Christ. And seeing folks take the waste of terrible circumstance and produce the wonder of God's providence is tremendously encouraging to all of us. It makes Romans 8:28 come alive, to see that all things really do work together for good and that nothing, absolutely nothing, goes to waste. Listen to how Paul put this in *1 Corinthians 15:58*, he says this: *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.* It's not wasted. And part of the beauty of the church that Christ envisioned was a body of believers joined to one another by nothing more than their love for Christ and his kingdom. And within that body of believers, there will always be some whose lives add encouragement to others. Would that you and I could be those very people.

But unfortunately there's the other side of the coin, and Paul had this to say about that. This is verse 15. Paul says: *Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.* What are we to make of this? Well, I would say there's two very different things that are at work. First there is the gospel itself, and secondly there are those who are proclaiming it. Looking at the gospel and those who minister, it can be a daunting and discouraging exercise. But understand something. God can and will use any and all means to preach his gospel including but not limited to donkeys and rocks. Let me explain.

Balaam was a false prophet in Israel. He's riding on a donkey and he's riding right into the arms of an angel who is determined to take his life for his apostasy. For some reason the donkey that he's sitting on sees the angel, which Balaam cannot see, and so it balks. And when the donkey balks, Balaam starts beating his donkey. Its response produced one of the most bizarre dialogues in all of scripture. This is *Numbers 22*. It says: *When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam,*

*"What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you." And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?" And he said, "No." Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face. What I find astounding in this dialogue is not so much the donkey, that's bizarre as it is, but Balaam's reaction to it. I mean he doesn't miss a beat when it comes to answering a talking donkey. I mean he doesn't seem astounded or befuddled at all. He just launches into a diatribe with a donkey itself, "Man, I'd kill you if I had a sword." Well, the donkey's actually serving his master. I mean he's warning Balaam with his impending doom. But what this illustrates is that God can use anything including donkeys to speak his truth. He can also use rocks. When Jesus was triumphantly entering into Jerusalem, the religious leaders were furious that everybody was there giving him public worship. This is Luke 19. It says: As he -- This Is Jesus -- as he was drawing near -- already on the way down the Mount of Olives -- the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who*

*comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."*

So if God can use donkeys and rocks, well he can certainly use sinful fallen men and women to proclaim his gospel. I have no doubt that many people have been led into the kingdom of God by people who may not have accompanied them to that place. Balaam was used of God as a prophet, and yet scripture says that he and his ilk are -- quote -- *"wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever."* Jesus goes on to say: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"*

To be frank, I've had my share of connections with people who may have been proclaiming the very same message I'm proclaiming but seeming as if they never -- it never made the transition from their heads into their hearts. There are quite frankly people who have



much of the Bible committed to memory who are miserable people. I know because I've rubbed shoulders with some of them. See, the way I see it, the loveliest person who ever walked the face of this planet was the Lord Jesus Christ. He had every single quality that we admire in a person and he had them to perfection. Not only did God himself leave heaven and assume flesh so that he could die for us on the cross and secure heaven for us, he also came to live out the best possible life a human being could live. You know I preached about the fruit of the Spirit. Just to refresh your minds, it's listed in *Galatians 5:22* where it says: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.* Jesus was the living embodiment of all of those nine qualities. He also made it very clear that there was but one way to obtain that same fruit in your own life, and this is what he said in *John 15*. He said: *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*

You know for many years one of my hobbies was growing fruit and fruit trees. I got really into grafting for a while there, I learned all the different types and the ways that you do it. I mean I have trees right now that have branches this big around that I grafted some twenty-five, thirty years ago. And one thing that

always happens when you go to graft a branch, you have to understand that you can't make just a mechanical connection of a branch to a tree, I mean, you can't just drill a hole and jam a piece of a branch into it. You have to make sure that the two living parts of the tree and the branch that you're grafting have this intimate connection. There's all kinds of clever ways to mechanically insert a tiny branch that you're grafting into a tree into the cambium layers so that both of them meet. Without that there's no living bridge to connect the branch to the tree and the graft is going to die. And it was a learning process, you know, originally ninety percent of my grafts were unsuccessful because they were mostly mechanical, they missed that cambium connection. But as I got more skilled at it, close to seventy-five percent of my grafts would take and they actually made that living connection. They actually took on life. Jesus couldn't have picked a better example to make an analogy of what genuine life in the Spirit is like. You see, when Jesus says that whoever abides in him bears much fruit, he is referring to an intimate life-giving connection that enables the flow not of water and nutrients but of the Holy Spirit and the word of God that's now alive. Only the branch that abides in the vine has that live intimate connection. And only time will reveal which ones are living by tapping into the living water and which ones are dead, having nothing but a mechanical connection. And Jesus made it very clear that you don't get the

fruit of the Spirit just by studying the Bible and memorizing great portions of it, you get it only by abiding, by having a live intimate connection with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I mean, when I was in my young parenting days, there was a scripture that became extraordinarily popular, too much so, I believe. I think it was terribly misunderstood. It was *Psalms 22:6* which says: *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.* I mean, it's very basic. I mean all Solomon is saying here is that good training is going to last, whether it's training anything, mechanics, whatever, anything, good training is going to last. Well somehow we translated this into thinking that if you jam enough Bible into somebody when he's a kid, then he or she will be a Christian for the rest of his or her life. That's not a logical connection. I think we were guilty of not seeing the forest for the trees. Now if you're going to give training that lasts, it has to be training that centers on the loveliness of Christ. I mean we go to scripture to find out just how that loveliness played itself out in the life of Christ. And to try to reduce that loveliness down to some kind of systemized theology alone can reduce scripture itself into something cold and mechanical and lifeless. I mean Nikita Khrushchev was said to have memorized huge portions of scripture as a child. He became the most famous political atheist in the world

as the head of the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. I mean it's readily apparent that the scripture never made that eighteen-inch journey from his head to his heart. His connection to Christ was nonexistent and what he had was a very sharp mechanical connection to scripture, but that's not nearly enough. I've tried to put into words what abiding actually means and the best way I can think of it is the more you hang out with Jesus, the more like Jesus you are going to become. But that Jesus has to be alive and real and not just a series of propositions with Bible verses attached to them. And Paul gave ample proof of the fact that Christ was alive and well within him in the way he related to other ministers of the gospel, others who were only too happy to see Paul sitting in jail so that their ministries could succeed while his failed. Paul's response was absolutely Christ-like. Listen to what he says. He says: *Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.* Paul is saying I don't care if it's donkeys or rocks or overly ambitious preachers seeking to afflict me in my imprisonment, all I care about is that Christ is proclaimed. That's someone who realizes

once again that God wastes nothing. This is somebody who can sit in a prison cell knowing that God knows all things and that all things do indeed work together for good so he can relax and trust God for the outcome.

Well, so practically speaking how do you know if a minister's trustworthy? I mean how do you know if he's not just in it for fame or fortune or prestige, ego? The fact is you don't. I don't know that anyone will ever be able to fully know the heart motives of any minister outside of Christ himself. After all I'm a minister of the gospel and more than a few times I've been taken to the woodshed by Christ. I've been taken for pride and for arrogance and for laziness and selfishness, for thinking more highly of myself than I ought. I imagine that's probably the case for any and all ministers of the gospel. We are all a work in progress. I mean I know one of my daily prayers and Janice can attest to this because I pray it every day is I ask God not just for wisdom but for the unique wisdom that will enable me to see my own sin and my own folly because I don't want God to have to do that for me, I want to do it myself. And if you notice, Paul really had no problem dealing with sinful ambition in preachers as long as it was directed to gospel truth, but he had no such charity when it came to false teachers and neither did Jesus. This is what Jesus said. He said: *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you*

*in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* See, my expectation of anyone who is preaching the gospel is that he too has some measure of that fruit. It may be just starting to pop out on the branches, it may be growing steadily or may be even bending the branches under a full load of fruit. I've known ministers who represent all three of those states, but what matters is there will be fruit. But that's not just for ministers. That's true for every one of us. I mean if you sense you have nothing but a mechanical connection to the living God, if you sense that there's no there there other than that, God has a solution for you. *Jeremiah 29* says: *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.* You say, I don't know how to do that. That's okay. What do you do? All you have to do is ask God for that living connection. Say, God, I don't know how to do this, how do I abide in Christ? How do I become a fruitful branch? God says: *"So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased*

*tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit."*

So why is Paul able to sit contentedly in a Roman jail cell wasting away? It's because he knows that for a kingdom citizen nothing, nothing is wasted. He knew that there in this dark, dank Roman prison he was still growing fruit as if he was outside in the sunshine, and that's the one thing that kept him and keeps us moving forward regardless. *For those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Let's pray.*

*Father, I want to pray right now for anyone who says and is feeling the conviction of your Holy Spirit, saying, I don't have that connection to God, I don't have that intimate connection, that life-giving connection. I have this mechanical thing. I have this set of propositions that I've been taught and I believe it but I need more. Lord, if there's anyone in this building that is thinking those thoughts, praying those prayers, I pray your Spirit would speak to them. I pray that they would stop and stay here for a bit and just talk to us so that we can iron it all out and get it squared away. Lord, I know what you want for each of us is that live, living, intimate connection and I pray that you would grant it, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*