

Pentecost 20 / October 11, 2026

Philippians 4:6

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

With Thanksgiving Make Your Requests Known to God

Paul begins this letter with thankfulness saying in the third verse of chapter one, *“I thank God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.”* He thanked God for their partnership in ministry and their fellowship in their common faith in Christ Jesus. Truly a reason for thanksgiving! The direct occasion for this letter was his thankfulness for a gift from them brought to him in Rome by one of their members, a man named Epaphroditus. Thanksgiving pervades this letter throughout. Near the end of chapter four Paul writes, *“I am well supplied having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”* Even though he was in prison there was something for which Paul could give thanks. We always have reason to give thanks to God, for the love and support of fellow believers and especially for His love in Christ Jesus.

Paul was thankful for their gift of love, which expressed their concern for him and their awareness of his afflictions. You see Paul wrote this letter in prison, probably his house arrest in Rome described at the end of the book of Acts, possibly in the notorious Mamertine prison, Rome’s maximum-security prison, near the end of his life. Regardless, by his tone of thankfulness you wouldn’t know Paul was in any prison, if he hadn’t mentioned his imprisonment was for Christ. Paul was thankful for their gift. He was thankful, because their gift expressed their awareness of His sufferings and most importantly, because this led him to remember God’s gift of love in Christ Jesus. There is nothing more important than remembering and giving thanks for the gift of God’s love in Christ Jesus. It is the foundation of our lives as Christians. It is the basis upon which we make our requests known to God. No matter where we are, no matter what our physical or emotional condition, we can always be thankful to God for the gift of His love in Christ. In Him we offer our supplications. To Him we express the feelings of our hearts. We cast our anxieties upon Him, knowing He cares for us.

The gift the Philippians sent Paul did not secure his release from prison, though it did make his imprisonment more bearable. Their gift provided for his physical

needs, food and clothing. Unlike modern prisons, prisoners in ancient Rome had to provide their own food and clothing. If Paul was under house arrest he would have had to pay rent for lodging and maybe even for the food of the soldiers guarding him. Ancient prisoners depended upon family and friends to supply their basic needs. If they had no one to care for them they would starve to death in dirty rags. The gift from the Philippians made life bearable on a physical level as Paul awaited trial. Their gift encouraged his spirits by reminding him that people loved him. It's important to know people care about us. Even though they were far away, he knew they remembered him in his affliction with their thoughts, with their prayers and through the gift brought to him personally by one of their members.

Even if people can't deliver us from our life situation, it is a great comfort and support to know we are loved. It is a great comfort to know that people remember us in their thoughts. It is most comforting to know they remember us to God with their prayers and supplications. But the thing Paul was most thankful for was the love of God in Christ that they expressed towards him with their gift. The Philippians couldn't get Paul out of prison or even join him in his imprisonment, but God does both for us in Christ Jesus. In Christ He shares in the suffering caused by our imprisonment in a world in bondage to sin, under the domination of the devil and the condemnation of death. In Christ, God empowers us with His Spirit so we may bear up under every trial and endure in every circumstance, giving thanks with grateful hearts and offering our prayers, praises and supplications for the sake of Christ. Most importantly, God releases us from our imprisonment to sin through the gift of forgiveness, received through faith in Christ Jesus. More than this, He promises us full release from our imprisonment in our share of His resurrection. For that we can all, always give thanks.

It is important that we approach life and approach God with thankful hearts. Bitterness is a root that produces deadly poison. It's easy to feel bitterness and to give in to negative thoughts and feelings. Thanksgiving is a time set aside specifically to give thanks for material blessings. In particular the harvest of the fields. Material blessings and benefits are important. However, it is unfortunate that we tend to see thanksgiving primarily in terms of material blessings and in the context of positive life situations. If we were spending Thanksgiving in prison we probably wouldn't be feeling thankful. If we are observing Thanksgiving with great sadness or other emotional and spiritual burdens weighing us down, we probably aren't feeling thankful. Many years ago, I was with a family at Thanksgiving who had lost a daughter in a tragic accident. "Not much of a Thanksgiving" one of her

family said as we planned her burial. Perhaps something in your life makes you feel the same. Sometimes we are hard pressed to find something material or positive in terms of our life experience for which to give thanks.

Paul was in prison. Paul didn't give thanks because he was in prison. He wanted to be released. He gave thanks and was thankful, because sisters and brothers in Christ remembered him in his imprisonment, remembered his needs and most importantly remembered Him to God with their prayers and supplications. It is important that we remember others with our prayers, petitions and supplications. It's important that they know they are remembered by us before God in prayer. Tell people you are holding them before God in prayer. It's important that we remember that no matter what our life situation and the feelings of our hearts, we always have something for which to give thanks to God: His love, His grace, His forgiveness, His promise and His presence with us in Christ Jesus.

We can always give thanks to God for His love and His presence in our lives in Christ Jesus. Paul writes in our text, *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice...The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God."* We rejoice that in Christ Jesus we can make our requests known to God, knowing He hears, answers and works all things to our good, especially to the fulfilment of our faith in eternity. We rejoice, because for the sake of Christ Jesus we can pour our hearts out to God in prayer. Someone always listens, always cares; God our Saviour. We rejoice and give thanks because the Lord is at hand. He is as close as a prayer. He is in His word, in the sacraments. He is in the fellowship we have with other believers, fellow members of the body of Christ, filled by the same Spirit. The Lord is always with us, close at hand to lead and guide us. He is always with us to forgive and heal us. He is always close at hand to hear our praises, receive our praises and respond to our supplications for ourselves, others and the whole body of believers.

The expression *"The Lord is at hand,"* can mean two things. It can refer to the return of the Lord, which believers are to anticipate every day. It is important that we remember the return of the Lord. It is the goal of our faith. It is a goal that will be realized fully when Christ returns as Lord. It is a goal we will reach in part when we return to the Lord at death to await with the saints in heaven His glorious appearing. It is the goal we will receive in its fulness when Jesus calls us to rise in His resurrection and enjoy eternal life in His presence. We can always be thankful that the Lord is at hand in this sense.

But in terms of our earthly experience the expression “*The Lord is at hand*,” is a powerful reminder of the Lord’s presence with us in our daily lives, in seasons of joy and seasons of sadness. The Lord is always at hand, right here beside us as we continue on our journey to the goal of our faith. The Lord is not at the end of the journey watching for us to appear on the horizon. The Lord stands beside us day and night as our rock and fortress. The Lord walks with us through His Spirit along the path of our lives. He speaks to us in His word. He washes us in the water of our baptism. He nourishes our faith, gives us strength for living and a foretaste of the feast of life to come, in His body and blood in holy communion. It is important for us to approach life and live with God in thankfulness for His presence in our lives and through His promises in Christ Jesus. The Lord is at hand, always with us, every step on the way, with every breath we take, to eternal life, where we will see Him fully and live together with Him forever.

In seasons of thankfulness and in seasons of sadness we can always give thanks to God for His love and His presence in Christ Jesus. We remember the words of Paul from prison “*in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” In Jesus’ Name. Amen