

January 15, 2012
GREAT INVESTMENT FOR THE
Philippians 1:3-11

Two old fellows were walking along the shoreline of a lake when a frog came hopping up to them. Creaking with age, one of the old-timers slowly bent down and scooped up the frog in his hands. As he stood there gazing at the frog, fascinated by its ugliness, the frog croaked, "Hey, mister! I'm not really a frog. If you kiss me, I'll turn into a beautiful princess who will do anything your heart desires." Startled, the old man slipped the frog into his pocket and headed on down the shoreline. For a while the two continued on in silence. "Well?" his buddy finally blurted out. "Well, You gonna kiss it?" "Naw, I guess not," the first man said. "At my age, I think I'll have more fun with a talking frog." About now someone is saying what in the world has that got to do with anything!

Well as we're looking at this New Year of 2012 some might be thinking **"I won't take any risks or new challenges. I'll play it safe, settle for what is sure. After all, we live in a world that is uncertain and fast changing. Let's just wait and see what the future will bring rather than giving up what we already know."**

Some will start 2012 with good intentions of doing better than last year, and making some changes. The question is:

What do you expect this year – what investment will you make to achieve it? What will you invest for your family, your vocation, your church?

I'm not talking about your money, 401K or mutual funds – rather how will you invest yourself?

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written while he was in prison. **Yet even there he's still investing his life for his brethren in Philippi and continues praying for them.**

As we look at the first eleven verses of chapter 1, we see that Paul has invested himself in prayer. While he is not free to go to others, he is still praying for them. And his investment in prayer pays huge dividends.

PRAY WITH THANKSGIVING

In **Philippians 1:3-5** Paul writes, **"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now."**

Paul keeps them in prayer, rejoicing in the fact that they received the good news of Christ

and continue to live in it. He invested himself in their lives by sharing Christ with them, but he didn't stop there. Paul continued **to pray for them.** With joy **he remembered them** in prayer. It is very good thing to pray for someone to receive Christ, but once they do, we need to continue to pray for them. Having taken the first step in their life in Christ doesn't mean they have arrived. **It means they have begun a journey and need prayer daily. And praying for other Christians is a joy!**

At the same time, We need others praying and thanking God for us.

Regardless of where, or what circumstances people are in, whether going through hard times or rejoicing in God's blessings, we have a common bond in Christ. Paul wrote, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." [1Cor.12:26]

Praying for one another strengthens all of us. Praying for one another binds us together in Christ. Invest yourself with thanksgiving in prayers for other believers.

PRAY FOR A GROWING LOVE + ____

Paul specifically prayed for the Philippians Christians "**that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight.**" [Phil 1:9-10a]

Can you imagine what would happen if each of us prayed daily for others in this congregation, for their love to overflow, to flourish and blossom. And what would happen if each of us became more loving? At our Weekly staff meeting we take time to share our joys and concerns, not only in our personal lives, but also in ministry. Then weekly we pray for one another. I fully believe that if your spiritual lives are not in order, we're not going to be able to do what God has called us to do – in fact we probably won't have a clue what it is.

I would hope each team is praying for one another – I pray that we as a congregation are praying for one another ... imagine the possibilities we a people of God get serious about lifting up one another in prayer ...not just the sick, not just a short prayer on Sunday, but praying daily .. **Imagine praying that those in leadership -- would have an heart for God that grows continually.**

There is a story that Michelangelo, the great sculptor and painter. One day he was seen pushing a heavy rock up a small incline to his work area so that he could begin chiseling. A neighbor watched him for over an hour as he worked to get this rock in place. Finally he asked, "Michelangelo, why do you labor so hard over that ugly, heavy piece of rock?" "Because" he said "there is an angel inside that wants to come out."

We all should be praying for one another, so that "the angel inside can come out." Pray that we each, will be set free to love others and put all grudges and differences behind us. Pray that

love will grow and flourish.

I don't know anything about much and less about sharks, but I read that one of the most popular aquarium fish is the shark. Supposedly, If you catch a small shark and confine it, it will stay a size proportionate to the aquarium. Sharks can be six inches long yet fully matured. But if you turn them loose in the ocean, they will grow to their normal length of eight feet. That can also happen to Christians. Being a cute little Christian swimming around in a little group puddle isn't enough. What we need is to see ourselves in the larger arena – the whole world – so we can become all God intended us to be. **If that is too overwhelming – see yourself swimming around Macon, winning others to Christ.**

Paul tells us that we are to be Growing in our knowledge of God & His righteousness, will, and truth – prepare us to love according to God's heart. And as we learn more about God, we also are aware of what is right in God's eyes. That causes us to want to change --

PRAY FOR CHRISTIAN MATURITY

Our God, “who began a good work in us will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” [vs. 6]

We all need people praying for us, so that we can grow in Christ-likeness and live a life pleasing to God. Jesus taught that the greatest command was to **“love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” [Mk.12:30-31]**

Paul reminds us that it takes the prayers of others on our behalf for us to live out this command. None of us is able to love God and others adequately by our own efforts. But through the prayers of others, we can grow in love. Invest yourself in this New Year in prayer so that others may grow in Christ-like love and thus be found pure and blameless when Christ returns.

Bill Bright tells the story of “a man who traveled to a certain city one cold morning. As he arrived at his hotel, he noticed that the clerks, the guests—everyone—were barefoot. In the coffee shop, he noticed a fellow at a nearby table and asked, ‘Why aren't you wearing shoes? Don't you know about shoes?’ ‘Of course, I know about shoes,’ the patron replied. ‘Then why don't you wear them? The visitor asked. ‘Ah, that is the question,’ the patron returned. ‘Why don't I wear shoes?’

“After breakfast, the visitor walked out of the hotel and into the snow. Again, every person he saw was barefoot. Curious, he asked a passerby, ‘Why doesn't anyone here wear shoes? Don't you know shoes protect your feet from cold?’ The passerby said, ‘We know about shoes. See that building? It's a shoe factory. We are so proud of the plant that we gather there every week to hear the man in charge tell us how wonderful shoes are.’ ‘Then why don't you wear shoes?’ the visitor persisted. ‘Ah, that is the question,’ the passerby replied. ‘Why don't we wear shoes?’

Bright says, "when it comes to prayer, many Christians are like the people in that city. They know about prayer, they believe in its power, they frequently hear sermons on the subject, but it is not a vital part of their lives."

Prayer is an essential in the life of a Christian, but too often missing. Judy Diehl, the author, Prayer Pieces, writes this in the introduction: *"Prayer is a "piece" of the Christian life that fascinates us, yet it is easy to ignore. It is something we openly claim to seek but secretly are afraid to find. We want to pray, and yet find that prayer is easy, disturbingly easy, to avoid. We know prayer is necessary, but we can't explain logically how it works. We want transformation in our lives, but we fear change."*

If you want a change in your life in 2012, if you're looking for a challenge that will truly be meaningful, then invest yourself in prayer this year.

I know some will think it's just double talk, but ...

Prayer is the best investment you can make for this NEW YEAR.