



GOSPEL  
*partnership*

DEVOTIONALS

# PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> And 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. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

# DAY 1

## PHILIPPIANS 1:1

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

*“It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. . . . There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.”*

So says C.S. Lewis in his well known sermon, *The Weight of Glory*. Where does he get this idea of no mere mortals? He shares it with the Apostle Paul who addresses the people he ministers among as saints. Paul here is not speaking of a class of deceased, venerated, people who were noted for extraordinary piety. Here Paul is speaking of the ordinary Christian who is made righteous by the finished work of Christ. Ordinary people from different races, classes and occupations, all set apart, made holy in Christ. As we begin the book of Philippians, this is important to stop and reflect on, for this truly is the proper notification for all who are in Christ. The people who claim Christ as their Savior that you sit next to in church, serve with, who drive you crazy, perhaps whom you even argue with on Facebook, these people are saints, sanctified by the blood of Jesus. It is important for Paul to set the tone for this book in this way. Philippians is a good church, but it does have its own tensions, which Paul will address.

From saints, note that Paul identifies himself as a servant, or slave, of Christ Jesus. If a saint is who he is in Christ, a servant of Christ Jesus is what he is called to do. Paul will often say things like *we are not our own, we are bought with a price* (cf. 1 Cor 6:20) to remind himself, and to remind us, that we have a calling in this world, i.e. to follow Jesus. It is our privilege to be in the yoke with Jesus, to follow his lead, to labor for his kingdom. As the psalmist says, better is one day in his courts, in his service, than a thousand elsewhere (Psalm 84)!

Finally, note that these saints and servants exist in the city. Philippi was a leading city, a Roman colony in Macedonia, or modern day Greece. As a Roman colony it was afforded certain privileges and certainly was home to a pluralistic menagerie of worship. But over the last decade of Paul's life he has seen the gospel take root in hearts and transform lives. As we will see in days and weeks to come, it is Paul's prayer that this transformation would abound more and more in the lives of these saints who serve this city.

## PRAYER

*Lord, as we come today we are humbled that in Christ we are made holy, saints for your glory. We do pray that your glory would shine through our lives as we seek to serve the city to which you have called us. As your servants, may our joy increase and our love for you abound each day. In Jesus's Name. Amen.*

# DAY 2

PHILIPPIANS 1:2

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ...

The Bible has four gospel accounts (*good story* or *good news* accounts). These accounts tell the good news of Jesus from their different perspectives and experiences: the Gospel according to Matthew, the Gospel according to Mark...according to Luke...to John. Today we're going to consider a gospel according to prepositions! A preposition relates different items to each other, and in our focus on them today, the good story shines out. The prepositions in verse 2 are *to* and *from*.

"To" expresses motion in the direction of a particular location. So here we have **Grace to you from God our Father**. "From" means forth or away, so moving from one to another. In this case **peace from God our Father to you**. These concepts are tightly linked, and they're both great news! This is a common greeting of Paul's, and it's profound. God is grace and peace, and from him we receive that grace and peace. It's his initiative, his desire, his character, and we are filled.

Grace is a gift from God that we don't work for or deserve. He delivers us out of our sin and misery. Think on this promise in good times and bad; pray it over our church and over our families and friends.

*Peace* in the Bible is more than the absence of conflict. It is complete well-being, involving reconciliation to God and to our fellows and the blessing of inner peace. Like grace, it comes *from God our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ*. (*New Bible Commentary*, Edited by G.J. Wenham, J.A. Motyer, D.A. Carson and R.T. France.)

Because Paul and Timothy were servants of Jesus Christ, they knew the best way to begin any interaction was to remember the grace and peace from God to us. It gives real hope to every conversation, situation, struggle and joy.

Are you a servant of Jesus? Receive his grace and peace and share the good news of what he offers to others! If you're not a servant of Jesus, go to him today; receive the grace and peace that he offers. Call the church office (616) 949-9630 and let us know that you receive the grace and peace of God the Father so we can rejoice and journey with you.

## PRAYER

*God, our Father, how we long for your peace and grace. We need you every hour. Thank you that it doesn't depend on us at all, but it's all you. Make this real to us today, that we may view all of our circumstances through your grace and peace to us and through us. Hold on to us we pray. Amen.*

# DAY 3

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> And 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.

Work partnerships are vital to societal flourishing; no less in the community of the church. God said in the first days that “it is not good for man to be alone,” and thus instituted the fundamental building block for partnership in marriage. This is extended not just through the nuclear family, but through the whole family of God. Even the greatest introverts or the most independent cavaliers among us need the partnership and community of God’s people!

Paul and the Philippian church are an example of partnership that displays the enduring comfort and strength in the interdependent family of God. That is why Paul can reflect back on his friends and co-laborers in Philippi with abounding thanksgiving and joy. It wasn’t a mere membership to a common social club that led to this sort of bond. It was a “partnership in the gospel” (see verse 5). They were in the trenches together working side-by-side to proclaim their joy found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, their partnership was cause to be greatly encouraged. Why? As they gathered, both physically and in memory, they were reminded of the enduring reality that knit them together.

Paul reminded them of a promise, “And 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” (verse 6). This is no wishful thinking. Paul is not sharing empty encouragement like a bad Hallmark card or aesthetic Instagram graphic. Paul stakes his encouragement in the reality that the gospel is true because Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. Singer-songwriter and author Andrew Peterson describes this dynamic memorably in his song, *Remember and Proclaim*:

*As we gather round this table  
We remember and proclaim  
Christ has died, Christ is risen  
Christ will come again*

*There’s nothing to fear  
And everything to gain  
And so we gather here to remember  
To remember and proclaim*

Just as Paul’s reminiscence on his partnership with the Philippian church gave him great joy and confidence in the gospel, so we too have a hearty encouragement awaiting us in the embrace of our brothers and sisters in Christ. God intends to use His community of faith in our lives as visual and experiential reminders of the gospel. What an honor and a joy that the Lord would use you and me to such an end!

Tomorrow we will take a deeper look into the nature of their shared experience.  
*Take a moment now to reflect on the strength and comfort found in the family of God.*

For many of us, words like “community” and “partnership” can at times evoke bitter memories where we were hurt and disappointed. Paul wrote this very letter amidst great suffering and persecution due to his ministry, so this “gospel work” was directly tied to real trauma too. Yet the Spirit of God apprehended Paul even in the darkest moments such that he could say he was “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10).

*Take a moment now to rest in the comfort and strength that your labor is not in vain; surely the steadfast love of God endures forever!*

## PRAYER

*Lord almighty, thank you for the work you have begun in us. We remember, even during this prayer, of the many peoples, places, and experiences that you have used in our lives to teach us the love of your son Jesus. Thank you for each of them. O God, sustain us during these trying days, that we might be filled with joyful assurance of our eternity with You. Lord, use us as your vessels to remember and proclaim. In Jesus name, Amen.*

# DAY 4

## PHILIPPIANS 1:7-8

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Paul begins verse seven with a transition from the previous verse. He is sure that God will bring to completion the work that he began in them because “I hold you in my heart.” Why does Paul feel so connected to them? It is because both share in the grace of God but in what way do they partake in that grace together?

The grace that they share is manifest in two ways, but not in ways that we might expect. First, Paul identifies his imprisonment as something that they share in, but how do they share in that and how is it a form of grace? To share in Paul’s imprisonment could mean either that the Philippians have supported him during his imprisonment or that they have shared in his suffering. It is likely that Paul is talking about how they have supported him during his imprisonment as Paul thanks them for their support in chapter 4.

*Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.* Philippians 4:14–15 (ESV)

In fact, they were the only church to support him as they shared in his trouble. Another possible meaning is that the Philippians, like Paul, are being persecuted.

*For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.* Philippians 1:29–30

What is interesting is that this suffering is “granted” to them as a grace. It is a grace because suffering for the sake of Christ connects and identifies both the Philippians and Paul with Jesus Christ.

The second grace is that they share *in the defense and confirmation of the gospel*. Not only do they share in their suffering with Paul and Jesus but in their mission as both to serve and to advance the gospel (1:12). The Philippians and Paul are connected through Jesus in their shared suffering and mission, and this fosters a great affection in Paul for them.

Paul describes his affection as the affection of Jesus Christ but what does he mean by that? This will be revealed by Paul in chapter two but at the heart of it is a people who are of one mind and accord, and like Jesus Christ are willing to put others first and be self-sacrificial as Jesus was. This self-sacrificial affection can be seen in the relationship between Paul and the Philippians as they sacrifice for each other and share a mission.



# PRAYER

Psalm 40: 1-5

<sup>1</sup> *I waited patiently for the Lord;  
he inclined to me and heard my cry.*

<sup>2</sup> *He drew me up from the pit of destruction,  
out of the miry bog,  
and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure.*

<sup>3</sup> *He put a new song in my mouth,  
a song of praise to our God.*

*Many will see and fear,  
and put their trust in the Lord.*

<sup>4</sup> *Blessed is the man who makes  
the Lord his trust,  
who does not turn to the proud,  
to those who go astray after a lie!*

<sup>5</sup> *You have multiplied, O Lord my God,  
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;  
none can compare with you!*

*I will proclaim and tell of them,  
yet they are more than can be told.*

# DAY 5

## PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

<sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

One of the beautiful aspects of this Philippians passage is that it really is a window into what Paul's relationship with this group of believers was like. His initial contact with them was at least a decade earlier and this letter helps us to see the growth in the Philippian believers and the growth in Paul's relationship with them. These verses also give us significant insight into some of the reasons for that growth. Clearly, prayer was a central element in that growth. Paul had been praying for them since his first encounter that is detailed in Acts 16. The content of those prayers that we see here in verses 9-11 is also instructive for us as we pray for our brothers and sisters.

How can we follow Paul, and pray for our fellow believers in ways that go beyond health and navigating crises? Look at the details of what Paul prays for:

First, he prays for love to abound. Perhaps we take love too much for granted. This prayer is an acknowledgement that love cannot be taken for granted. To practice it we need to pray for it. And notice the love Paul prays for is not just a collection of warm or affectionate feelings. It is love that is accompanied and shaped by "knowledge and discernment." We should want to know and understand our fellow believers. This is substantial love that is way beyond superficial sentimentality. It is a love that requires action based on that knowledge— action that may cost us dearly. We'll see in the next chapter that this love includes a willingness to die for fellow believers.

Second, Paul also prays for excellence, purity and blamelessness. Paul is conscious of how we are seen by people outside the faith and how our behavior affects non-believers' perceptions of Christ and his body. Our characters should reflect Christ's and attract people to Him. We often shy away from that kind of responsibility, yet Paul makes it a part of his regular prayers for his believer friends in Philippi.

Thirdly, Paul prays that the Philippians would be filled with "the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ." Our lives are not meant to win praise for ourselves but praise for God. Paul prays that the Philippians' lives are filled with the fruit of attitudes and actions of Christ. When that happens, Christ is glorified.

Paul ends this prayer confidently with doxology. Our future with Christ is assured and that provides us with the confidence and motive to pray and live with Christ at the center of our thoughts and prayers for our fellow believers.

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, Thank you for this model of prayer. Bring it to mind as we go through our prayer lists. Remind us of all you want us to be and how much you work in us daily. May your Spirit instill in us the quiet knowledge and confidence that you are completing a great work in us even as we pray every day. Amen.*