

The Book of Philippians

Lesson 1: Partnership in the Gospel -- Philippians 1:1-11

Picture a man sitting in a rented room with a soldier chained to his wrist. The light is poor, his future is uncertain, and the verdict that could cost him his life has not yet come. You would expect a letter from such a place to be heavy with complaint. Instead, when Paul picks up his pen to write to the church at Philippi, the first thing that spills out of him is joy. He cannot get through his opening sentence without thanking God. There is something here we need to understand, because most of us would not respond to a prison cell with gratitude.

The friendship behind this letter goes back years. Philippi was the first place in Europe where Paul preached, and the church there was born in unlikely soil, a businesswoman named Lydia, a slave girl set free, a jailer baptized in the middle of the night. From that strange beginning grew a congregation Paul loved like family. They had stood with him when others drifted away. They had sent him help when he was in need. And now, even from prison, he wants them to know that they are on his heart every single day.

What Paul calls this relationship is striking. He calls it a partnership in the gospel. Not a fan club, not a charity, not a loose acquaintance, but a shared life with a shared mission. The Philippians were not spectators watching Paul work. They were in it with him, carrying the same good news, bearing the same burdens, investing the same hope. That word partnership will set the tone for everything that follows in this letter.

And underneath Paul's joy lies a quiet confidence that should steady us too. He is sure that the God who started something in these believers will not abandon the project halfway. The same God is at work in you. Whatever began in you when you first met Christ was not your idea and is not finally your achievement. It is God's good work, and he intends to finish it. As we open this letter together, let us ask God to make us partners, not bystanders, and to deepen the joy that no prison can take away.

Group Discussion: Paul opens a letter from prison with thanksgiving and joy rather than complaint. What do you think allows a person to respond to hardship this way, and where have you seen it?

Personal Reflection: Paul says he holds the Philippians in his heart and thanks God for them every time he remembers them. Who are the people God has placed in your life that you give thanks for, and have you told them lately?

Read Philippians 1:1-11

Study Questions

1. Paul calls himself and Timothy “servants of Christ Jesus” and addresses “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (1:1). What does this opening tell us about how the New Testament church was organized and about the identity of every believer in it?
2. Paul says, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you” (1:3). When you think back over the people in your own life of faith, does gratitude come first, or does something else? What would it take for thanksgiving to become your first response to others?
3. Paul rejoices because of their “partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (1:5). What does it mean to be a partner in the gospel rather than merely a member or an attender, and how does that change the way we see our place in the church?
4. Paul speaks of a partnership that has continued “from the first day until now.” Where are you actually investing yourself in the work of the gospel right now, and where have you settled for watching instead of sharing in the labor?
5. Paul is confident “that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (1:6). Who began this good work, and what does this verse teach us about God’s role and our own in the Christian life?
6. Think honestly about your own walk with Christ. Where do you feel stuck, half-finished, or discouraged about your progress? How does it change things to know that God himself is committed to completing what he started in you?
7. Paul prays that their “love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment” (1:9). Why does Paul tie love to knowledge and discernment rather than letting love stand alone? What happens to love when it has no knowledge to guide it?
8. Paul prays for a love that grows. Name one relationship in your life where your love has grown cold or careless. What would it look like this week for your love there to abound more and more, with real discernment?
9. Paul prays that they may 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” (1:10–11). What does this teach us about the goal of the Christian life, about the coming day of judgment, and about where the fruit of righteousness actually comes from?
10. Look back over this whole passage. Paul’s joy, his thankfulness, his partnership, and his confidence all flow from being caught up in something bigger than himself. Name one specific way Jesus is using these verses to form you, to reshape how you pray, how you give thanks, or how you invest your life in his work.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 16:11–15, the birth of the Philippian church through Lydia; 1 Corinthians 1:4–9, Paul’s thanksgiving and confidence that God will sustain his people to the end; Galatians 6:9–10, not growing weary in doing good and working for the good of all;

Colossians 1:9-12, a prayer that believers be filled with knowledge and bear fruit in every good work; Romans 16:16, the churches of Christ as a family of partnered congregations.