

# The Gospel Partnership

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[ 0 : 00 ] So the reading is from Philippians chapter 1 and it's verses 1 to 11. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you, in all my prayers for all of you. I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart, and whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that for your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best, and 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, good evening, and welcome to St. Silas.

[ 1 : 40 ] It's great to be thinking through this great passage this evening. It's great to see you all. And so, why don't I pray, and then we'll look at this wonderful passage together.

Thank you.

We commit this time into your hands and pray for your sustained blessing upon us, that you might give us joy in you. In Jesus' name. Amen. So, let me ask you today, what is it that gets you excited? What is it that gets you excited? That type of excited, where you can't wait to tell other people. Now, it might not just be one thing. There could be a whole list of activities that make us feel that way. A couple of examples, you know, if you're people who are starting in a new relationship, that sort of feeling with texting one another, and waiting to see, and looking forward to seeing each other.

[ 3 : 11 ] Or it might be for you, it might be just looking forward to your birthday. Some people are mad about Christmas, or going on holiday. Those things are exciting, aren't they? And don't get me wrong, we shouldn't feel bad about that.

But what I want to suggest, are that the things that excite us like that, they sort of, in a way, they do point out what matters to us. Those are the things that we care about, we daydream about, and in a sense, it's what we prioritize.

What I want us to think about today, is what spiritually excites us. What spiritually excites us. In fact, maybe, maybe a better question might be, are we excited by spiritual things?

And if we are, what sort of spiritual things excite us? Is it when we, when we come to church, is it sort of, we look really forward to the music, is that, oh yeah, I can't wait to hear the music. Is it, is it, is it listening to God's word?

Is it meeting with other Christians? Is it growth group? What is it? Is it, are we excited by those spiritual things? It's a good, it's good thing, good things to, and don't get me wrong, those are great things to be excited about.

[ 4 : 22 ] On other things, great things to be excited about. But as good as, for an example, a new relationship is, as good as that is, or maybe something else that makes you, feel, feel that way. What we, what we prioritize spiritually, and gets our blood pumping, if you like, will impact us in a different way.

Maybe it might even, it might even impact how we think about those other types of things, or maybe, maybe it should impact how we think about them. So you've heard today, we're starting in this new series in the book of Philippians, Paul's letter to the church in Philippi.

Paul had a real connection with Philippi, you might recall. It's in Acts 16, he was in prison there, but dramatically, the jailer and his family, they ended up getting converted, when a big earthquake happens.

And he planted a church there. This letter he's writing to the church, is sometime after that, that we think, we're not quite exactly sure. We think it's probably when he's under house arrest.

The church in Philippi, they've sort of sent this bloke called Epaphroditus, you can read about him further along in the letter. They've sent him with a gift, financial gift, for Paul to support him in his ministry.

[ 5 : 36 ] And it's following him receiving that gift, that he writes back to them. It is a wonderful letter. There's lots of encouraging things, that come out of it, that we'll see as we go through the letter, over the sort of weeks ahead.

But one thing that comes through, particularly in this opening section, is what spiritually excites Paul. What spiritually excites Paul, what gives him joy, and what he gets excited about.

I just want us to look for a moment, in the next chapter, chapter two from verse one. He says, Paul is excited, he says, it makes his joy complete, when Christians are in one mind with Christ.

When they live with the same mindset of Christ. When they demonstrate this in how they live, and how they make decisions. In this opening section of the letter, that's what we see.

Paul is excited by the church in Philippi, because they demonstrate this mindset. This Christ-like gospel mindset, which is expressed through their gospel partnership with him.

[ 7 : 12 ] And that's what we're going to be thinking about this evening. It's this gospel partnership, that stems from a Christ-like mindset. And we're going to be thinking through, what that sort of means for Paul, and what it means for the Philippian church.

And we're going to be thinking about it, at three points. Gospel partnership is joyful. Gospel partnership demonstrates spiritual fruit, and gospel partnership is prayerful.

Gospel partnership is joyful. Gospel partnership demonstrates spiritual fruit, and gospel partnership is prayerful. So firstly, gospel partnership is joyful.

I wonder for a moment, if we could just imagine, there's Paul, he's under house arrest. And I just wonder, you can imagine him sitting there, he's for preaching the gospel.

And I wonder, what was he daydreaming about? What was he hoping for? Now, I know this is pure speculation, but I'm guessing he was thinking, I'm wondering, about the churches he'd planted, and the places he'd been, and maybe the other churches he'd not been, but the ones he'd heard of.

[ 8 : 17 ] Thinking, I wonder how they're getting on. I hope Lydia and that jailer, I hope they're doing all right. Imagine his response, when this bloke, Epaphroditus, turns up, after being sent by them, by the Philippian church, with this gift of money, to support him in his ministry.

Imagine how he felt. Wow. Well, he tells us, he tells them, in this letter that he sends back to them. Just look with me, from verse three.

I thank my God, every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel, from the first day until now.

He's totally delighted. He's full of thanks to God. He prays with joy. He's excited. And just notice, what is it that makes him joyful? I always pray with joy.

Why? Because of your partnership in the gospel, from the first day until now. Now, that word for partnership there, it's koinonia in the Greek.

[ 9 : 26 ] It can also mean fellowship. To be in partnership, and to have fellowship, they mean the same thing. That's quite striking. Because it's quite different, to what we might think of, when we talk about Christian fellowship.

I suppose in church circles, when we talk about Christian fellowship, when we think of that, we often think about like, having a time when we're hanging out, or spending time together.

Or maybe we might use it as a time, when we're having tea and coffee before, or after the service. But that isn't how Paul uses it. Now, I'm quite sure that, you know, Paul would have enjoyed hanging out, with his friends, and the Christians in Philippi.

And, you know, as I said before, we can read about, what happened in Acts 16. I'm sure they enjoyed eating together, and sharing time together. But fellowship, partnership, for Paul, it's not about those things, as good as they are.

It's the gospel. The fellowship of the gospel, is at the center of his relationship, with them. And he recognizes, it comes first in their lives, as well as his.

[ 10 : 35 ] That's what brings him joy, and why he's so thankful. What does it say? That from the first day, until now, from the first day of their conversion, from the moment they were converted, they've continued doing gospel work.

I'm guessing, Epaphroditus would have told them, they've been witnessing, about the good news of Jesus Christ, where they live in Philippi. Now, they've supported him financially, in his gospel work. And, they've stood by him. We read that in verse 7, when he was in chains. They've stood by him, even when he's in prison, because of his preaching of, what? Because of his preaching of the gospel.

These are gospel people, and they're sharing gospel work, with Paul. And I suppose, we have to, we have to make sure, don't we, that we're like the Philippian church, that we put the gospel first, at the center of our relationships, with each other.

First and foremost, it's the gospel, that brings us into fellowship, with one another. It's the gospel, that keeps us in fellowship, with one another. And I know that, for many of us, that's exactly what happens.

[ 11 : 44 ] Perhaps we've been in conversations, after church, where we talk about, how we've been impacted, by the sermon, by what we've heard, from God's word. Where we've talked about, what we're learning, in our devotions.

When we meet at growth group, or at roots, and we share about, how the gospel is, encouraging us. And I just want to encourage you, if you're doing that, keep on doing it, keep encouraging each other.

And when we meet, you know, we need to have the gospel, at the center of what we meet for. Let's encourage one another, with the grace of God, we can spur one another on.

To be obedient, to love Jesus more, in what we do and say. And we do that as a church, don't we? You think we partner with, with missionaries, across Scotland, we partner with missionaries globally.

And I know, what do we do? What gives us joy? It's when we hear, from our gospel partners, that gospel work is happening. You think when we meet, on a Wednesday, on the first Wednesday every month, we meet to pray.

[ 12 : 46 ] That is one of the focuses, of our prayer, is that we hear from, you know, we get newsletters, about people, that we've sent money to. And we hear back about how, you know, people becoming Christians, about how gospel work is happening.

It's a real joy, that we give money, and gospel ministry happens, in Brazil, and Rwanda, and other places. It's right that we give, thanks, when we hear about that.

Gospel ministry, is joyful. It is joyful. It gets us excited. Secondly, gospel partnership, demonstrates, spiritual fruit.

Fruit. Gospel partnership, demonstrates, spiritual fruit. Now, so, at this point, where have we got to? So we know, gospel partnership, or fellowship, brings Paul joy.

And we know that, it's because Paul, loves the gospel. He loves Christ. He seeks to preach, nothing, but Christ crucified. But I want to suggest, that there is something, something else going on here.

[ 13 : 48 ] We get it, I think what we see, what we see is, there is a big insight, into Paul's heart, for the church itself, if you like. Because what I think we see, is Paul is excited.

Yes, he's excited, that they're with him, and that they're, supporting him, and that he hears, of what they're doing. But he's, he's excited about, the impact, that the gospel, is having, on the believers themselves.

The very fact, the very fact, that they're witnessing, about Christ, that they're supporting him. That, in itself, is evidence, of the work of the gospel, in their lives.

It is evidence, that they have this, gospel, Christ-like mindset, the things that gets him excited.

They're the real deal. I don't know if you, you ever remember, I think it was, I don't know if it's an old, catchphrase now, but for, it's for Coca-Cola, and they always used to say that, it's the real thing.

I don't know if that's that, I don't know if that's still, the catchphrase now, on the adverts. But I suppose, that it came about, because, it's when there's lots of other, drinks on the, started to hit the market, like Coca-Cola, but they weren't the real thing.

[ 14 : 55 ] They looked, had all the shiny tin, shiny packaging on the outside, but inside the can, it wasn't Coca-Cola. In the, and what they were saying, Coca-Cola was in the advertising, they were saying, what you want, what you really want, is you want the real thing, you want the real deal.

And in their actions, that's the church in Philippi, they're like, that their lives are showing, they're the real deal, they're the real thing, and Paul wants to tell them that.

They've been changed, by the almighty power of God, by the gospel. And just look with me, in verse six, in what he says to them, to encourage them in this, he says, Paul is confident, that God is at work in them, and will continue, to work in them.

He's confident, because of their gospel, partnering with him, it demonstrates, it's evidence, if you like, that God is at work in them, it is evidence, of spiritual fruit, in their lives, that they're the real deal, they're the real thing.

Witnessing about Jesus, it's a good work, that is evidence, that God is at work in them. Supporting Christian mission work, is evidence, that God is at work in them. Standing by persecuted believers, it's evidence, that God is at work in them.

[ 16 : 24 ] And the astonishing thing, we read in verse six, is he began the work. He began the work. God began that work in them, and he won't stop.

The same gospel, that called them, out of darkness into light, from slavery into freedom, the same power that saved them, is at work in them. He who began a good work, will carry it to completion. It doesn't say, he may carry it, to completion, or should, but it says, he will. He's not going to stop, he's going to finish, the job he started.

And it is the same, for you and me. Our good works, our gospel, fellowship, partnership, it's evidence, that God has begun, a work in us. And he will bring it, to completion.

Isn't that a wonderful thing? Isn't that a wonderful thing? The gospel is continuing, to transform us. And our good works, are evidence of that.

[ 17 : 25 ] we are not, what we once were, but, we're not yet, what we will be. We're not what we once were, but we're not yet, what we will be.

God is at work, in me, and in you. Isn't that another reason, to be joyful, when we see, and we know, that we can see, the gospel impacting, people we know, in our church, and lives around the world, and we can, we know that it's impacting, us as well.

And I suppose, I was thinking about this, I think it's, it's a great thing, that also helps to, to assure us, that we, we're true believers, that we're, that we're the real deal. And I think that's maybe true, even more so today, than in, years gone by, in Scotland.

Because, years ago, Scotland, you know, it was deemed, a Christian country, everybody went to church, but today, in secular Scotland, just, why would, why, would you talk about the gospel? Why, why would you support gospel work? Why would you do that? Unless you, unless you're actually, a believer yourself, because, in a worldly sense, what profit is there for it, in the UK?

[ 18 : 37 ] The majority of the time, it's just going to get you hounded. Partnering, fellowshiping, in the gospel, it's evidence that God, is at work, in you, and he, and he, it's he who started it.

It's he who started it, so finish, what he started. I suppose, just to add on to this, I just want to say, if, if you're sat here, listening to this, and, you think, you're needing, a bit of assurance, in your faith, and sometimes, we can question our faith, belief, can't we?

Am I a true believer? I'm not, I'm not quite sure. Am I the real deal? Maybe you're, sat here now, racking your brain, wondering, if that's you, and, and things I've said, you think, I haven't done any of the things, that he's mentioned.

I don't know what my, my good fruit is, I'm just a miserable sinner. The, the fellowship of believers, it is a means of grace to us, in the church, and I just suggest, maybe grab, grab someone from church, who you know, maybe somebody from your growth group, or roots group, who really knows you well, to go, take them for a coffee, and ask them, ask them the question, how can you see God, at work in me?

What is my spiritual fruit? Use it as a means, of assurance in your life, because that's what, we see Paul doing here, he's sending the letter back, saying, you're the real deal, Philippi, I can see God at work in you, and he began that work in you, and he's going to finish it, and we all need that reassurance, of people saying, yeah, do you know what, I can really see that God, is at work in you, and he's going to start, he's going to start, what he, he's going to start what he, what he, he's going to finish what he started, so yeah, just, just try that out, the mean, the fellowship of believers, is a

means of grace to us, okay, thirdly, gospel partnership, is prayerful, we look at the actions, look at, we look at the actions, of the Philippian church, and, I think what we, what we see from Paul, it's quite, it's clear isn't it, they mean a lot to Paul, don't they, he's very moved, by their support, of him, of his partnership with them, and it matters to him, if we just look, look down with me, we've got verse eight, it says, he says,

[ 20 : 48 ] God can testify, can testify, how I long, for all of you, with the affection, of Christ Jesus, I long for you, he, he yearns for them, but it's, there's something special, about this longing, it says, with the affection, of Christ Jesus, this longing for them, it is, it is a spiritual, yearning, a longing, it is bound up, with the relationship, that he has with them, through Christ, and we, we sort of see, how this expresses itself, in prayer, we already know, from verse three, that Paul, is praying for them, but here we see, the contents, the specific, the specifics, the type of prayers, that he prays for them, and it's not surprising, knowing that, what we've looked at, and thought about, that the gospel, is what excites Paul, that the gospel, motivates his prayers, for them, just look with me, we've got this wonderful prayer, from verses nine to 11, just look down with me again, and he says, and this is my prayer, that your love, may abound more and more, in knowledge, and depth of insight, so that you may be able, to discern what is best, and 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, it is an astounding prayer, Paul wants them, in the ups and downs, of life, to live, anticipating, where they're headed, the day of Christ, to live with that day, in mind, wanting them, to keep growing, and do what they're doing, growing in love, for God, and for each other, but it's not a, it's not a gushing, romanticized, sort of sentimental, sentimental type of love, but there's, there's edges to it, look, it said, it's love with knowledge, with knowledge of God, what that means, what that means, for our lives, what that looks like, it's got discernment, it's got wisdom, it's love with a purpose, that wants us to love, so that we live, the best way, that looks like Christ, it sort of reminds me, of when, you know, you're learning, how to do something new, I was thinking this week, about my little boy,

Angus, for an example, and because he's learning, new skills, all the time, now, when I, when I sort of, came up with this, on Thursday, Angus, had just, what I thought, I'd used, he'd managed to master, a spoon, and eat his porridge, and so I was, I was proper chuffed, until Saturday morning, when the floor, was covered in porridge again, so, this kind of, doesn't work anymore, because he's not yet, mastered a spoon, but I'm hoping, that in a year's time, I'm not still saying, the floor is covered in porridge, and I've wanted him, to get it better for ages, it's quite demoralizing, when you're wiping porridge, up every morning, and I was thrilled, on Thursday morning, because the floor, actually was porridge free, I couldn't believe it, but I think it was just a fluke, I've wanted him, to grow in that, and I suppose, as he does, as he gets older, he's going to grow, and develop new skills, and I want him, to keep growing, I want him, to keep developing, this is Paul's heart, for the church, he's thrilled, by what he sees, but he wants them, to keep growing, in loads of, loads of ways, and when is it, it's up until, right up until, the day of Christ, to continue supporting, missionaries, like himself, to continue putting, their sin to death, to live a pure life, to love their neighbor, more and more, to do evangelism, and to keep doing it, all their life, right up until, the day of Christ, that spiritual fruit, it is the fruit, of righteousness, it comes because, we've been made righteous, through the gospel, through Christ, and we see here, it all fits together, it all fits together, the gospel, must encapsulate, all of us, every part of us, but it, but it anticipates, where we're headed, the day of Christ, these are gospel priorities, and Paul wants, to see the gospel, advance in their life, and extend towards, the day of Christ, where they will be complete, in him, I think this is, it's really challenging, for me, when we think about, prayer, and I suppose, what we pray for, maybe for our own lives, and maybe if we think of, you know, the lives of other people, because, if we think, when we read this, and we think of how much, how central the gospel, has to be, it should infuse, our prayer lives, right, but notice, that there's nothing, about the circumstances, of their lives, mentioned here, there are a couple, of instances, elsewhere, in the scriptures, when Paul, and the apostle John, they do talk, about praying, for circumstances, but, the majority, of prayers, in the New Testament, they're all about, the gospel, they're all about, growing, and being more like Christ, and letting the gospel, change how we live, and I've just been challenged, like, how often are my prayers, about those types of things, or how more, how much are they, just about, you know, the daily anxieties, and struggles, and things that we have, like our money, or mortgages, health, other people's health, our kids at school, jobs, difficult people, who we work

with, loads of stuff, and I want you to,

I want you to hear me rightly, what I'm not saying is, I'm not saying this, I'm not saying, that we shouldn't pray, for those things, of course we should, we can offer, all types of prayers, and petitions, we're told to, to God, and he loves us to, at least we're praying, you know, we're praying, we're bringing things to him, but, but I wonder, if this just might, nudge us slightly, that our prayers, could be flavored, with gospel priorities, remember, we look through Romans, what does Romans 1 says, it says that the gospel, is the power of God, for salvation, the gospel, is the power of God, and I wonder, if there's, there is something special, about letting our prayers, be percolated, by the gospel, there is something special, about that, there is power there, when was the last time, you or I, prayed a prayer, like verses 9 to 11, for anyone, or, or even for yourself, it's normally dictated, by day to day events, and I suppose, why, why not try it, next time, you want to pray for someone, just turn to this, and pray it through, for someone, it's a wonderful prayer, to pray,

[ 27 : 22 ] I was even thinking like, the next time, somebody asks me, how can I pray for you, just go, let's just, let's just look at this, let's just look at this prayer of Paul, and pray that, gospel partnership, is prayerful, and so we've looked, at what gets Paul excited, well, it's the gospel, isn't it, the gospel brings Paul joy, but it's what the gospel, is doing, and when he sees God at work, through the gospel, when he sees this gospel mindset, this mind of Christ, demonstrated, in the church, it's why he's so chuffed, with the church in Philippi, they love the gospel, too, and their fellowship, the relationship with him, is one that's centered, on the gospel, and Paul can see that, Paul can see that, this church, they're the real deal, they're the real thing, there's real spiritual fruit, going on, and he's thrilled, he's moved, he's thankful, to God, for what he's doing, knowing that he's going, to continue, in that church, and so he prays for them, that more would come, that they'd love, and abound in love, more and more, that the gospel, would keep impacting them, transforming them, the gospel, is exciting, isn't it, it is, it is a wonderful joy, it is brilliant,

I mean you just think, about this church, in Philippi, at one point, they were just, they were a bunch of sinners, they hated God, they didn't want to know him, they were lost, they were in a pit, in darkness, they didn't, they would have been the same, they would have, when Jesus was being crucified, they would have put him, on the cross, just as much as the Jews, they hated God, they trampled over, whoever they wanted, to serve their own, false good God, they were totally lost, that's what these people, in Philippi, were like, and then, they hear the good news, of the gospel, you got this jailer, who's told, repent and believe, in the Lord Jesus, and you'll be saved, and all his family, become Christians, Christians, and, they're totally changed, and all of a sudden, you've got a church there, that's what we were all like, isn't it, we were all in that state, we were totally lost, we were totally lost, there was no hope, for any of us, there was no chance, of us becoming Christians, on our own merit, but the power of God, to come into our lives, the power of God, it never runs out, the love of God, it never runs out, he's taken us, that same power, that raised Christ, from the dead, that transformed, this bunch of sinners, this church in Philippi, is the same power, that has taken us, and set us free, from all the garbage, in our hearts, forgiven us, made our hearts, skip a beat at Christ, and he's still doing it, look at the good, he's doing in us, just think, the people in St. Silas, or the missionaries, who are connected to, the different ways, people serve, all the gospel partnership, that goes on, he's still at work in us, and he'll continue, to be at work in us, and he's going to bring it, to completion, the good work, that he started, in each of us, there is an abundance, of reasons, to be joyful, and thankful, in the gospel, there is an abundance, of reasons, everywhere, to be thankful, and joyful, because of the gospel, let me pray,

Lord God, we thank you so much, for all that you've done, we thank you, for your wonderful gospel, we thank you, that you've taken sinners, like us, and that you've, you've taken our sins, away, you've forgiven us, and you've given us, a new heart, that wants to, praise, and honour, and worship Christ, and we thank you, so much, that, there's nothing, in us, that deserves that, but it's just, by your grace, and by your mercy, and we praise you, and thank you, that, for the way, that you're at work, in us Lord, that you're going to, change us, and carry on working us, right until, the day of Christ, you're going to complete, what you started in us, and we just, pray that you'd, I pray that you'd, continue to fill, we pray this, this prayer, for our own, for our own hearts Lord, we pray that, your love may, abound more, and more, in knowledge, and depth, of insight for us, so that we may be able, to discern what is best, and may be pure, and blameless, for the day of Christ, that we may be filled, with the fruit of righteousness, that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory, and praise of God, we ask that in Jesus name, Amen.