

The Who of Gospel Partnership

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[0 : 0 0] Okay. Well, my introductory joke involved that. There we go. So, The Who are an English rock band that formed in 1964. Their classic lineup consisted of lead singer Roger Daltrey, guitarist and singer Pete Townsend, bass guitarist John Entwistle, and drummer Keith Moon. They are considered one of the most influential rock bands of the 20th century, selling over 100 million records worldwide and holding a reputation for their live shows and studio work. Thank you, Wikipedia. The Who are now all in their mid-70s, which means that now whenever they're singing Who Are You, they really want to know because they can't remember. That's the obvious joke. We're moving on. So, we're talking about the Who of Gospel Partnership. And so, obviously, you know, we've got to talk about the Who. But the Who of Gospel Partnership, what we're talking about is something that's, in particular, been weighing on my mind over the past few weeks.

In particular, because our church has been advancing through the stages of a pastoral search, in particular, as I've been interacting with other pastors in our town, other pastors in our fellowship, it's been weighing heavily on my mind what a blessing it is to have partners in the gospel. What a blessing it is when God provides the right people to partner together with. Because, you see, a lot of times when we Christians, when we talk about our mission to spread the gospel, our mission to spread the good news of who Jesus is, the good news of what Jesus did to save us, a lot of times we talk about our mission in terms of, you know, this vision that we have for our own lives or a vision that we have for our church. So, for example, I could talk about advancing the gospel in terms of God calling me to be a pastor or God calling me to be a missionary or God calling me to lead a ministry to the poor or God calling me to serve in the church nursery. Our focus is on what we're doing. Our focus is on the what of gospel partnership, what we are called to do for our church, what we're called to do for our community, what we're called to do for our world, what we're called to do for the sake of Jesus Christ.

We as local churches as well, on a church level, we can talk about advancing the gospel in terms of our children's or youth ministry programs, or in terms of our outreach strategy to the community, or in terms of our missions budget, or in terms of our Sunday morning attendance numbers. Once again, our focus is on the what, what we're doing, the what of gospel partnership, what we are called to do for our community and our world, what we are called to do for the sake of Christ.

Now, that what of gospel partnership, that is very important. That's very important. That's something that we do have to figure out. We have to figure that out as individuals. We have to figure that out as a church. We have to determine in specific, concrete ways how to obey the great commission that Jesus gave, that instruction to go and make disciples of all nations. You have to think through how exactly and how specifically you're going to do that.

But before we even do that, there is something that has to come first. Before we determine the what of gospel partnership, we have to determine the who of gospel partnership. The who of gospel partnership.

[3 : 4 7] This phrase reminds you and me to consider carefully who we are as gospel partners. And it reminds you and me to think carefully about who we choose as gospel partners.

So first, are we the right kind of people? Are we ourselves the right kind of people for gospel partnership? Second, have we chosen the right kind of people to partner with? Have we chosen the right kind of people to partner with? I was moved to think in this direction by a chapter of the Jim Collins book, Good to Great. And this book, Good to Great, it's about leadership of visionary companies.

But really what Collins has to say, it illustrates what we see throughout the New Testament book of Philippians. As you can see, our sermon text is basically chapter one, verse one through chapter four, verse 23. That's the entire book of Philippians. We're not going to read the whole thing.

But we are going to look at selections from it and get an idea of what's the big picture that this book is telling us. Now, if I'd been a much more careful student of the Bible, what I learned from Jim Collins I would have picked up much earlier from Philippians. But I really appreciate what Collins has to say about what partnership with other people looks like. And so here are his words. He talks about visionary leaders of companies and he says, The good to great leaders understand three simple truths.

First, if you begin with who rather than what, you can more easily adapt to a changing world. If people join the bus primarily because of where it is going, what happens if you get 10 miles down the road and you need to change direction?

[5 : 32] You've got a problem. But if people are on the bus because of who else is on the bus, then it's much easier to change direction. Hey, I got on this bus because of who else is on it. If we need to change direction to be more successful, fine with me.

Second, if you have the right people on the bus, the problem of how to motivate and manage people largely goes away. The right people don't need to be tightly managed or fired up.

They will be self-motivated by the inner drive to produce the best results and to be part of creating something great. Third, if you have the wrong people, it doesn't matter whether you discover the right direction.

You still won't have a great company. Great vision without great people is irrelevant. Great vision without great people is irrelevant. Right? Now, what Colin says is true about business, it's something that the Apostle Paul says is also true about the church.

Because long before this book was written, the Holy Spirit gave God's people a message through the pen of his apostle, the Apostle Paul. This is a message that encourages you and me to settle the who of gospel partnership before we think about the what, before we think about how specifically we're going to advance the gospel.

[6 : 50] This is because Paul focuses intensely on the mindset. He focuses very intensely on the mindset of people who are effective partners in advancing the gospel.

And what we learn from Paul's letter to the church in Philippi is that a strong gospel partnership requires partners with a gospel-centered mindset.

A strong gospel partnership requires partners with a gospel-centered mindset. Now, the reason I really feel compelled to preach this message this morning is that we as a church, we're in a situation, we're carefully considering our partnerships in the gospel.

So first of all, we've been considering a man to serve as lead pastor of our church. We're trying to decide who we can partner with closely as a leader, as a member of the same family.

So we need to know the who of gospel partnership. Is this candidate for pastoral ministry the right kind of man for this partnership? And just as importantly, are we, are we the right kind of people for this partnership?

[8 : 06] This is a big deal to me. And just as an aside, one of the reasons that I came on staff as associate pastor two and a half years ago at this church was because I realized as I was here that I fit right in.

That the who was right. And that made a big difference when, you know, as over the last couple of years, the what has changed a whole bunch. I've not, I've not been doing all the things that I was originally brought on to do.

I've been doing a lot of things that I wasn't brought on to do. But that's been okay because the who is right. As the what changes, as the way in which I've had to advance the gospel as a pastor of this church has changed.

That's been okay because the who is right. So when it comes to calling a lead pastor to our church, we want to ask, is this the right kind of man for this partnership?

Are we the right kind of people for this partnership? Second, we live in a town where the Christian community is quite small. We're connected closely with one another.

[9 : 11] Many of you, I mean, all of us pretty much have friends who are believers who are parts of other church. We've got really good friends. There's lots of connections, lots of relationships there. Now in a large city, you can, you can build even a mega church that's got these massive resources.

Massive resources. A church that functions and can even function as if no other churches are present in the community. It can exist as an island unto itself. Not so in Squamish.

We at Squamish Baptist Church, we need to ask, how do we choose partners in the gospel from our neighboring churches and from other organizations that can serve along with us?

How do we ourselves become good partners in advancing the gospel? We have to ask those questions first before we determine what exactly we do in our partnership.

So to answer these questions, you'll need to turn with me to the book of Philippians. And I want to show you how right from the get-go, right from the very beginning of the book of Philippians in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wants us to see that partnership in the gospel is the key theme of this letter.

[10 : 22] A lot of people misunderstand some of the key themes of Philippians. Partnership in the gospel is the very central theme and you can know that because it comes out right from the beginning. Because after Paul's, what's called his salutation or his greetings in chapter one, verses one through two, here are the very first words that Paul writes beginning in verse three.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

It's because of your partnership in the gospel. And that word partnership, or maybe you have an older translation that says something like fellowship. This partnership appears frequently throughout the book of Philippians.

Paul has a unique partnership with the church that he's planted in Philippi. They encourage one another. The church supports him financially, especially as he's in prison.

Paul strengthens the church through his teaching and instruction. And what Paul wants this church to develop is the same gospel-centered, gospel-driven mindset that Paul himself already possesses.

[11 : 42] Paul wants the people of the church to think, to speak, to act in a way that is motivated, in a way that is driven by the gospel, that is motivated and driven by the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised to new life for us.

The truth of the gospel. It produces a change in their behavior. It has a real effect on them as they share in this experience of Christ's saving work, how he has saved them.

They are transformed into partners in the gospel. And that produces a shift in their mindset.

The first mindset shift that is present in gospel partners is a shift toward unity. A shift toward unity. A strong gospel partnership requires partners with a gospel-centered mindset that supplies unity.

It supplies unity. If you continue a few verses down to chapter 1, verse 27, we see Paul telling us how the gospel unites us against outside opposition.

[12 : 59] And here's what Paul writes. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. So that whether I come and see you or I'm absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

So because we've been given a new identity as citizens of a new kingdom with a new manner of life, we stand firm in one spirit and we're not united just for the sake of unity.

We're united because we're striving for the faith of the gospel. Unity for the sake of unity is not what we're going for. Unity for the sake of the gospel is what we're going for. Our unity against internal conflict also.

It comes out from the gospel. Chapter 2, verse 1. Paul writes, So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind.

By being of the same mind, having the same mindset. Our identity is being united with Christ, our knowledge that we are loved by Christ. Our experience of receiving the Holy Spirit.

[14 : 29] All of that changes us so that we share the same mindset with one another. A mindset of humility, a mindset of concern for the interests of others.

Because God has made us his children, we live out that identity by rejecting irritable and resentful attitudes toward one another.

in chapter 2, verse 14, Paul writes, Do all things without grumbling or questioning that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.

And then all the way in chapter 4, verse 2, Paul writes that our union with Christ, the fact that we are in the Lord together, our union with Christ, it indicates that we are meant to be united not only with Christ but because we're united with Christ, we're also united with one another.

And so he writes in chapter 4, verse 2, I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Wouldn't it be great if you got your name into the Bible because you were in a fight with another believer?

[15 : 49] For thousands of years, you are renowned as the person who couldn't get along with another person in your church. Paul says, agree. Why? Agree in the Lord.

You're united together with Christ. So if we're wondering who you and I can partner together with in advancing the gospel, look for people, look for churches who are eager to promote unity, who are eager to promote unity around the gospel.

look for people who aren't content with, as we've seen, this quiet resentfulness, this conflict that lingers below the surface. They don't tolerate open conflict with one another either.

They don't avoid confrontation over difficult and awkward issues. They take the initiative to communicate clearly and frequently. They work out, resolve their issues. They forgive one another.

They're reconciled to one another. They do this because the gospel has changed their identity. They're now members of God's family. They're now citizens of God's kingdom.

[16 : 50] They're united with Christ and so they're united with one another. Their gospel-centered mindset supplies unity. And if you and I, if we are going to partner with people like this, then we too must have our minds shaped, remolded by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

we look for pastors, we look for churches who are eager to promote unity. We look for pastors who communicate with one another, who wish to strengthen one another's churches.

We look for churches that share the same gospel message that we do. Churches where this gospel message is not only shared, it's also a gospel message that's not just assumed. It is a message that is placed front and center, repeated over and over and over.

Look for churches where secondary matters of doctrine, they're taught, but they're not harped on. We look for pastors who are cautious and careful about teaching members of another church secondary doctrines that contradict what that church teaches.

Why are they cautious? Because they want to put the gospel front and center. They want to unite around Jesus Christ and his gospel. They rally around what is of first importance.

[18 : 16] They strive side by side. Their gospel partnership is so important that they reject grumbling and disputing. Their gospel-centered mindset supplies unity.

And if you and I are going to partner with other churches like this, we too need that mindset. We too need to have our minds shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ so that our unity around this good news is so important that we're not going to compromise it for any reason.

There's a second shift that takes place in the mindset of gospel partners. That shift is toward perseverance. It's toward perseverance. A strong gospel partnership requires partners with a gospel-centered mindset that supplies perseverance.

It supplies perseverance. We start again in chapter one. Paul writes in chapter one, verse six, about the Philippian church. 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.

So Paul expects that their faith and together with their faith, their partnership is going to persevere. It's going to be vindicated on the day when Jesus Christ returns.

[19 : 44] In verse nine, he explains how the Philippians are going to be vindicated. It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent.

And so 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.

So the message of the gospel, it's not only that we have been credited, accounted with Jesus' righteousness. That's a beautiful, a wonderful truth that we are now accepted before God because we are counted as righteous, because Jesus has stood in our place.

but the message continues and says that we will persevere, those who truly believe in Jesus Christ, who have truly been called out of darkness into his light.

We will persevere in our faith until we are vindicated on the day of judgment. We will make progress in our faith as our love abounds more and more and more.

[20 : 53] and so Paul writes about his hope of the resurrection on that day in chapter 3, verse 12. He says this, not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on, I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Gospel partners press on toward the prize of knowing Christ. they press on because Christ Jesus has made them his own. He has united himself with them.

They press on because of their changed identity that they learned about when they heard the gospel and they believed it. And that's why Paul tells them in chapter 4, verse 1, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

You whom I love, you've been united with Christ, you belong to him, stand firm in him. So if you're wondering who you and I can partner together with in advancing the gospel, you look for people, you look for churches, you look for ministries who are eager to persevere, who are eager to persevere.

They aren't content with the fact that they've been justified by the death of Jesus Christ as a substitute for them. They celebrate that and rejoice in that, but they don't just sit on their laurels and do nothing.

[22 : 24] They aren't satisfied to be mere churchgoers with little to no progress in their walk with the Lord. They press on to know Christ. They press on and long for his return and his resurrection where they are raised to life to live with him forever and ever.

They stay the course to the end. They have a track record of persevering. They do this because the gospel has changed their identity.

They belong to Christ. They're united with him. They long for him to return and be vindicated when they stand together with him. Their gospel-centered mindset supplies perseverance.

And they not only persevere in their faith, they persevere with you. They're going to hang in there with you. And if you and I are going to partner with people in churches like that, then we too.

We've got to be that kind of person too. We need to have our minds shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. So this mindset, this gospel-centered mindset that supplies unity, it supplies perseverance, and there's a third shift that takes place in the mindset of gospel partners.

[23 : 42] That is a shift toward joy. It's a shift toward joy. A strong gospel partnership requires partners with a gospel-centered mindset that supplies joy.

In this letter of Paul's, it is filled with expressions of joy to the point where some commentators and some believers misunderstand to think Philippians is a book about joy.

Well, it's primarily about partnership in the gospel. But Paul, he can't talk about partnership in the gospel without talking about what a joy his partners are to him and what a joy he is to them.

Right away in chapter 1, verse 3. Paul says this, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always and every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.

Why? Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. This partnership, this persevering partnership, it is itself what brings Paul joy.

[24 : 52] Paul loves the fact that their partnership is persevering even though he's separated from the church. Paul loves to see gospel partnership because he loves to see the gospel advance both within the lives of the people that he's serving and advancing out into the world.

Paul even loves it when people who treat him like a competitor. He even loves it when they're preaching the gospel to unbelievers. In chapter 1, verse 18, he says, well, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

Somebody's thinking of Paul as a competitor instead of as a partner and Paul says, well, they're out there preaching the gospel to people who don't believe. Great. great. I'm happy about that.

Paul loves to see believers transformed by the good news. It comes up again and again. He says, chapter 2, verse 2, they can complete my joy by being of the same mind.

Chapter 3, verse 1, he encourages the church to rejoice in the Lord, to rejoice in their union with Jesus Christ. Then in chapter 4, verse 4, he brings it up again. Rejoice in the Lord always.

[26 : 14] Again, I will say rejoice in case you missed it the first time. So if you're wondering who you and I can partner together with in advancing the gospel, whether it's a pastor, whether it's other churches, whether it's other believers, you look for people, you look for churches who find joy in the gospel and really enjoy partnering with one another and advancing the gospel.

It is important to them. They love it. They love to remind each other of the good news. They love to tell the good news to those who haven't heard of it. They love to hear how the gospel is advancing through their community and around their world.

One sign of pastors who have this mindset is when I'm talking with them, and I tell about the good things that are happening in our church, I can tell they get excited. Wow! The Holy Spirit is moving in your church.

That's great! That's amazing! They love it. It brings them joy. They love to be with one another. They yearn for each other with the love of Christ, and they do all this because the gospel has changed their identity.

They are united with Christ. They are united with the one who knows them and who loves them. He will transform their lowly body to be like his glorious body when he returns.

[27 : 39] Their gospel-centered mindset supplies joy. Real joy, not fake, shallow, artificial happiness. Deep, rooted joy.

If you and I are going to partner with people and with churches like this, we too need our minds shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to be joyful people and joyful partners.

partners. So we're looking for partners with that gospel-centered mindset that supplies unity, perseverance, joy. So let me return to the questions that we as a church face right now.

First, are we in a place to develop a strong partnership with a lead pastor who can lead and serve this church well as its pastor? Second, are we in a place to develop strong partnerships with other churches and ministries in our community?

Well, it depends. The answer depends a lot less on the size of our church budget. It depends less on our ministry plans and programs. It depends less on our strategy and vision for reaching our community.

[28 : 50] And it depends a lot more on who we are. It depends less on what we're doing. It depends a lot more on who we are and on who this person is. Are you the kind of people who possess a gospel-centered mindset so that your whole being is shaped by the good news?

Have you developed a mindset that supplies unity, perseverance, and joy? And will the future pastor of our church share our mindset that is centered, driven, and shaped by the gospel?

Will the churches and ministries we choose to partner with share our mindset that is centered, driven, and shaped by the gospel? This question extends as well.

There's so many implications to this. This question extends to the decisions that you make as individuals. Because many of you, especially if you're young and you're zealous for the Lord, you're wondering, you know, what does the Lord want me to do for him?

Maybe you're wondering that now. You don't have to be young to wonder that. Whether in middle age or whether as you grow older, you might find that the way you serve the Lord is shifting. And you're thinking, where do I fit in?

[30 : 06] What do I do? What do I do? What assignment has the Lord called you to? That's an important question. But I encourage you to ask this one first.

Before you ask that question, ask this question first. Who has the Lord called you to partner with? Who has the Lord called you to partner with? Who can you strive side by side with for the faith of the gospel?

Become the kind of person, become the kind of person that has developed this gospel-centered mindset. Find like-minded people that you can partner with and go all in.

This will help you decide where you will find your church family, who you will marry, what friendships you will pursue. Look for the who. There's an example of this in the book of Acts.

It's an example that's stood out to me in seminary and it's really stuck in my mind for quite a while. It's a story of the who before the what. It's a story of how the Lord takes two people and welds them together into gospel partnership.

[31 : 18] And the story begins in Acts chapter 11. And there's a man named Barnabas. In Acts chapter 11, this man has been sent to the city of Antioch.

The Holy Spirit is doing a great work there among the Gentiles. Not just Jewish people, among the Gentiles. And Barnabas has been sent to that city to see what's going on and he shows up there.

And in Acts chapter 11, verse 23, here's what we're told. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, joyful we could say.

And he exhorted them, he taught them, all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose to persevere, you might say. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

[32 : 19] For a whole year, they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. So Barnabas, a man overflowing with joy, a man who perseveres and challenges people to persevere, he's also a man who longs for unity.

And he brings, he goes, finds this guy named Saul, this man who used to persecute Christians. But now he's been saved, he's been transformed, he's become a Christian. And he's a very knowledgeable man.

And so Barnabas says, this is the kind of guy I want. He's looking for who to partner with. And what's funny is, the two of them start working together and the what keeps changing.

For that first year, as we see here, the what, what they're doing is teaching the church in Antioch. But then the what becomes a famine relief effort. Barnabas and Saul, they work on together, bring famine relief to Jerusalem.

And then the what changes one more time. Acts chapter 13. The church at Antioch. It's been filled with prophets and teachers who are mature and wise leaders.

[33 : 30] And then in verse 2 we read, while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Notice he actually doesn't even say what the work is yet. The Holy Spirit says, the who is what's important.

That's what's the most important in the first thing. As you continue to read, you see how the Lord uses Barnabas and Saul to bring the gospel to Gentiles like you and me. And then Saul takes on a new name, Paul.

And the apostle Paul continues bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. He even brings them to the Gentiles in Philippi and then later writes the letter to them that we've been reading this morning.

But all the way back in Acts chapter 13, verse 2, the Holy Spirit is more concerned with the who of gospel partnership. He doesn't even tell them right away what the work he's called them to do will be.

[34 : 32] He establishes the who and then reveals to them the what. The who is Barnabas and Saul. They're the ones getting on the bus together. Why? Because they share the same gospel-centered mindset.

A mindset that supplies unity, perseverance, and joy. A mindset that the Holy Spirit loves to see in people like you and me. And just like those two men of faith, you and I, we can partner together in powerful ways when our partnership is centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, I want to make sure we're not just talking about gospel this, gospel that, gospel-centered this, gospel-centered that. We need to keep front and center in our minds the gospel.

And so I think it would be valuable for us to end by reminding ourselves of the gospel message that we rally around because this is the basis, this is the reason for our partnership, and this is what is in our mind and driving the way we live and driving our attitudes.

So to remind ourselves, to remember, let's turn to two historic expressions of our faith.

[35 : 45] We're going to recite together a couple of historic expressions of our faith. First, the Nicene Creed of the 4th century. Second, the five solas of the Protestant Reformation.

The Nicene Creed explains the beliefs of what it calls the Catholic Church with a lowercase c. In the original sense, the Catholic Church is the universal church.

That's what the word means. Universal Church of Jesus Christ. This is something we can all rally around together. So let's say together the words of this ancient creed.

Say it with me. I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.

He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father.

[37 : 24] And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.

And I believe one holy Catholic and apostolic church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen. And next, join in responding to me as I read the five solas of the Protestant Reformation. Once that's put up on the screen here, I'll read the parts that are marked leader and then you respond with the bold words that are marked all.

First, sola scriptura means scripture alone. The Bible alone is our highest authority. Second, sola fide means faith alone.

We are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Third, sola gratia means grace alone. We are saved by the grace of God alone.

[38 : 49] Fourth, solus Christus means Christ alone. Jesus Christ alone is our Lord, Savior, and King. Fifth, soli Deo Gloria, to the glory of God alone.

We live for the glory of God alone. Amen. Our Father.