

Philippians 1:1-11

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening.

I was thinking as we were thinking about our passage tonight, we're going to start a series in Philippians tonight, and we'll get to the passage in just a minute. But as I was thinking about the passage this week, I was thinking about a conversation that I had recently with a young man in our church who has been in a dating relationship for a while, and things are going well, and he's starting to see that there might be a finishing point on the horizon for this relationship, and kind of exciting to talk to him about this.

But you know, we had conversations last spring about his relationship, and some of the struggles that he'd been having, because as he had shared, they dated for a while, and then they broke up.

And part of the reason they broke up is because they were so consumed with figuring out, are we the best fit? Like, are we the best partnership possible for us to maximize or to optimize our life investment in the world?

And even for God's kingdom, they were thinking about it in terms of Christian terms. They were thinking, how can we be the best optimal team to do the best thing in the world?

[1 : 37] And as they wrestled through that, they broke up, and then they got back together, and they started this. And I asked him this fall, I said, so what do you think is different? He said, well, you know, I think, I think I've stopped trying to figure out how to optimize my relationship, because I just love her.

And we talked for a while about this in his relationship, and I'll be honest with you, I resonated with it, because I had done that in my dating life in the past. But as I was reflecting on our passage tonight, I was thinking that this is actually a more fundamental human pattern, where we often enter into relationships thinking about, what am I getting out of it, and what am I putting into it?

We have this economy of, is this relationship worth it? And we're trying to measure whether it's actually worthwhile to invest in or not.

It becomes a contractual type of relationship. What do I get from you? What do you get from me? If it's worth it, we just keep going. I think that relationships like this, I've seen this in college students, when I worked on college campuses, maybe some of you relate to this, but they had to schedule in time.

I'm going to meet you from 3.45 to 5.15. You're my best friend, and I love you more than anyone else in the world. And here's the hour and 15 minutes that I have to give to you in all of my commitments, but it's really worth it.

[3 : 15] So let's do that. It may happen with your family members. Well, it's too much work to invest in that relationship.

I get drained, so I'm not going to do that. I think we love to be in control of our relationships so that we can measure this intake and outflow in a particular way.

And as I've seen that in my own life, what I've seen is that at the core of all of this way that we view relationships is that I am in the center, and I am in control.

I want to be able to say, how is this going to work? Is it going to be best for me? How am I optimizing my life through my relationships?

Because we think that's how we're going to get the life that we want, a life of fulfillment, a life of joy, a life of success. But if you've walked that road long enough, you'll see that you don't actually get that.

[4 : 20] You sabotage it, and you find yourself alone, and you find yourself scared, and you find yourself wondering what it's all for. And if you're in the church, if you're a Christian, you realize that you've lost much of what God has for you in the midst of a pursuit of something else.

The good news tonight is that the Christian faith points us to something different. It points to a different center of our lives and a different way to relate to one another.

And this is my launching into our passage tonight and our looking at the book of Philippians. And so if you want to turn there, page 980 in your pew Bible, we're going to be looking at the first 11 verses of it tonight.

And as you're turning there, let me just give you a little bit of run-up into what's going on in Philippi. Philippi was a city along a major route, a major trade route at the top of the Aegean Sea.

And if you don't know where the Aegean Sea is, it's between Turkey and Greece. And it was a major route. And the Apostle Paul had this remarkable journey.

[5 : 38] You can read through it, Acts 15 and 16, this remarkable work where God redirected him from where he thought he was supposed to go and sent him over from Asia, where Turkey is, over into Europe and to the city of Philippi, where the first time the gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed in this great city of Philippi.

And as he went there, God did a lot of amazing things. Some people were converted. They started a little group to study who Jesus is. There was a girl who was walking around who had a spirit of divination who said, these men are from the Lord Most High.

And Paul and his friends cast the demon out. And that got them in big trouble because this girl got her owners a lot of money. So they were thrown into jail.

And as they were in jail, singing praises to God, God delivered them. And through the end of it, he delivered them out of the city, giving them favor in the end by the magistrate in the eyes of the magistrates.

And as Paul went on to the next city in Thessalonica, a report came to Thessalonica saying, these are the men who turn the world upside down. It's kind of a cool way that the Bible talks about what God was doing through Paul in the city of Philippi.

[6 : 59] He was turning the world upside down in remarkable ways through the gospel. And Paul is now, later in his life, he's in prison.

You'll see this later in the book. He's in prison. And he's writing back to this church whom he dearly loves, who has given him lots of support, both by sending people and by sending material support to him while he's in jail.

And he expresses that this whole letter is a love letter to encourage these dear brothers and sisters whom he loves and who love him to continue on in the faith.

In some ways, the central exhortation, I think, is actually at the end of chapter 1 in verse 27.

Only let the manner of your life be worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that whether I come and see you or in absent, I may hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

[8 : 02] And then he goes on and he talks about the fact that this will probably include suffering for the sake of Christ, that they've been appointed not only to believe but to suffer for Jesus' sake.

But this, I want you to stand firm in this gospel, is in the center of the whole letter. And in light of this, then, he begins by talking about and expressing his relationship to these believers.

And I think we have a lot to learn about. So let's look at Philippians 1, 1 through 11. Let's read it together and then we'll continue. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus to the saints, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

[9 : 22] 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.

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve, 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.

Amen. Let's pray together. God, help us to understand your word tonight. Speak to us, Lord. Change our minds so that we would understand you rightly. Change our hearts so that we would love you more.

Change our will so that we would do what we are called to do. For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen. So as we look at this, as Paul launches this letter, as he launches into this great exhortation and love letter to his friends, what I want you to see is that at the very core of it is that God has called his people into a partnership.

You see it in verse 6, or verse 5 very clearly. Because of your partnership in the gospel. Or if you want to think about it a different way, he's saying God has called us into gospel friendship with one another.

[11 : 01] This is the very nature of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. As we respond to the call to believe and follow Jesus, he calls us into this gospel friendship with one another.

Gospel partnership. And that's what we're going to explore tonight is this idea of gospel partnership. And in order to do that, we probably need definitions of both of those words. First of all, what is a partnership?

The word here, you probably heard it, is *koinonia*. Sometimes it's translated fellowship. Sometimes it's translated sharing. It's being in it together.

Right? It's saying that in a partnership, you have more than one person who's come together for a reason. Right? So think about a soccer team.

Right? If you've only got one guy on the field and he's trying to do it all, he's not going to be able to succeed. He can't do what he's called to do because he's supposed to be a part of a team. Or I don't know if you've ever seen a crew team row.

[12 : 02] Right? Eight guys having to row in perfect unison together to keep the boat moving down the lake. One guy gets thrown out.

The boat falls apart. They can't do it. This is a kind of partnership. There are probably lots of other ways in which partnership, you can imagine in your own life, how does partnership look?

But it's this sense of being in it together. But the question is, partnership in what? Because you could be in a business partnership. You could be in a sports partnership, like the examples I've given.

What kind of partnership is it? Well, Paul says, in the kingdom of God, this is a partnership in the gospel. And that word needs definition too, doesn't it?

Because we talk about that. If I say gospel, you might think a certain kind of music. Right? Or you might, and it might be different kinds of music depending on where you're from. So there's old southern gospel and there's, anyway, I won't even begin.

[13 : 00] So there's lots of different things that it could mean. So what does it mean? What does Paul mean? Well, as we'll read through this book, he uses the word over and over and over again.

Actually, interestingly enough, without giving a really clear definition. But as you read all of Paul's letters, the definition of the gospel that I think would be most clear is, The gospel is the good news of what God has done in Jesus for us to rescue us from the terrible place of being in our sin without any way of getting out.

God has done something in Jesus. Jesus Christ, God who became man, who walked on this earth, who lived a life without sin.

He never did anything wrong. He had never disobeyed God. And then offered himself up in love as a servant for all of humanity to offer himself up as a sacrifice by dying an unjust death.

An innocent man dying an unjust death for people like us who are not innocent. And he did this so that we might be saved from the power and penalty of sin.

[14 : 26] So that by being raised from the dead, Jesus then conquered sin and death for us. And now is able to offer us forgiveness of sin because the penalty is gone.

New life because the penalty of death is gone. This is the gospel. This is the good news. So partnership in the kingdom of God is coming around this good news.

It is both the good news that we share among us and it is the good news that goes out from us. And that's what we'll talk about as we see. As Paul unpacks, unpacks where we're going with, in the rest of this first section in terms of gospel partnership, gospel friendship.

So the first thing, what I want you to do, look at verses 1 through 6. There are three points I want to see. That there's an affirmation of gospel friendship. There's an expression of gospel affection. And there's a direction of gospel agenda.

Well, I'll repeat those as we go. The first thing we see, though, in verses 3 through 6 is an affirmation of gospel friendship. I thank my God because of you.

[15 : 44] Always, in every time when I'm praying, I thank God for you because of the partnership that we share in the gospel. And one of the things I want you to see right up front is that as Paul's thinking about human relationships with one another, it is never purely horizontal.

Right? He could have said, I'm so thankful for you. I'm thankful you're a great friend. I'm thankful that you've been such a great help to me. But right away, Paul defines his relationship with them as horizontal in light of a vertical relationship with God around the gospel.

And this is really important. He's saying, look, our coming together is not just a nice contractual agreement where we can sort of be mutually beneficial to another.

But God has called us together. God has been the one who's initiated this. God has formed this reality of two believers coming together. Of Paul coming together with the believers in Philippi.

And God is in the center of it. And the gospel is the thing that has brought them there. And Paul says, not only do we have this that God has given it, but I want to express my confidence in you.

[17 : 01] I have seen God at work in you. I was there when the gospel was preached. I saw how your lives were changed. I see how you've been steadfast in the face of suffering and trial.

I see how you have continued on in your faith. Friends, stand fast in that. Because he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.

The day of Christ Jesus. Paul could have said all sorts of things about this friendship. But what does he say? I am so glad to see that the gospel has continued to be at work in you.

And I am confident that because God started it, God will finish it. And so press on, friends. Keep going in it. He says this is the foundation of gospel partnership.

When we see that God has brought us together. Think about it for a minute. What else brings you together? It was the first weekend of NFL season.

[18 : 03] Some of you might have. Although I find in this community far less. But some of you might have found yourselves coming together about rooting for the Eagles. Or somebody.

Right? Anyway. The Redskins. That's what my father-in-law cheers for. So. Right? So you could come around things like that. A special interest. A special hobby. Maybe some of you could come together around fly fishing.

Right? Or a particular kind of music that you enjoy listening to together. It could be an activity that you do together where you need other people.

Like the PTA. Or your lab partner. It could be all sorts of different things. It could be common experiences that you've had. We were in a theater troupe together.

Or again, we were on a sports team. There are all sorts of ways where we can connect with other people humanly. But what Paul says is that God has designed his people to have a much more deeper and profound connection.

[19 : 04] That centers on God's work in their life. And the truth of the gospel. That they come around together. This is really good news.

Because, you know, you could look around this building and think, how much do I have in common with that person over there? We come from a different family.

We're a different race. We have a different educational background. Different socioeconomic situation. Everything about us is different. And it would be the easiest thing in the world to simply walk out that door, having connected with the people who look like and have the same interests and common things as you do.

But what Paul says is, no, no, no, friends. God has called us to a partnership in the gospel. And because of what Jesus Christ has done in our lives, we can come together around that no matter how different we are.

That's one of our prayers and one of our hopes is that that would be real in this church. And not only for our sake, because we learn more about the gospel from people who are different than us, than people who are like us.

[20 : 19] We see the gospel more clearly when it's the only thing we have in common with those around us. But it's also a place that God holds up this to be a place of witness.

Because for Paul, the partnership in the gospel isn't just, hey, we all share in this thing together. But the partnership that Paul's talking about is the partnership of his ministry of proclaiming the gospel.

And one of the ways we do that is simply by having this gathering of people where if someone walked in off the street who had never been to a church, they might say, what do all these people have in common? And the answer is nothing but Jesus.

What a great testimony that is. It's only the beginning. There's more. We'll see it. We're supposed to be also then sent out in the partnership of encouraging one another to tell others of what a great Savior Jesus is.

But one other application point for this. As we think about this calling to go out into the world, you're probably familiar with C.S. Lewis' quote that we don't meet anyone who are mere mortals.

[21 : 28] We don't meet people who just at the end of their life die. We meet eternal beings every day. In his great language, it's the people who we snub, the people who we marry, whoever they are, they are eternal beings.

And when we see them at the end, they will either be people in their place of condemnation and sin who will be so horrible that they will be frightening to us.

Or we will see them redeemed by the blood of Christ and they will be so glorious that we would be tempted to bow down and worship. And so this partnership of the gospel that's meant to be the church is meant to be a partnership that is always inviting and calling people in.

Because everyone we reach, everyone we interact with, is an eternal being and has one of these two eternal destinies. So, not only to, so Paul says, gospel friendship is one of the core things that God has called us into.

The second thing is that he expresses a gospel affection for them. Right? Look with me in verses 7 and 8. You see this even earlier where he's talking about all of them.

[22 : 49] I love all of you and I always pray for you. And as I'm always praying for you, I'm always thanking God for you. But then when we get to 7 and 8, it's even more explicit. He says for, where am I? Verse 7. 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. For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

Paul is basically saying, I have you in my heart. In the very core of my being, I love you. You are partakers with grace with me.

That probably has two different meanings. One is a sense of, you have partaken of the grace that God has shown to you and me both by forgiving our sins in Jesus Christ. But secondly, a partaker of grace because God has given us this ministry of proclaiming this forgiveness of Jesus Christ to others.

And so, Paul is saying, I love you because we have been in this together from the very beginning.

[24 : 06] Right? He feels it so strongly. Verse 8, he says, I call on God to be my witness. How I long for you.

How I yearn for you. You have stood with me while I'm in prison in this place of shame. You have been with me as I've been out there proclaiming the gospel, the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Telling others about Jesus. Paul has been deeply engaged in this relationship with them.

This is a far cry from our human heart's tendency to calculated or contractual relationships. What do you get from it? What do I get from it?

That sort of thing. Paul is all in. I love you with the fellowship of Christ. With the affection of Jesus Christ. The affection that Jesus has for you, I share in that.

[25 : 09] He has shown it to me and I'm sharing it to you. Not because I'm getting things from you, but because I have gotten it from God. I don't know if you think about it.

I get challenged by this because it's so easy for me to be selfish. It's so easy for me to think, I'm tired. I don't want to talk to that person. I'm weary. What's the point?

What am I getting out of this? It's so easy for me to allow my reserve or my tiredness or my selfishness to get in the way of really engaging with other people the way God wants me to.

But this is a picture. This is a picture of what our heart investment as a part of the partnership of the gospel ought to look like.

Let me ask you this. Why do you come to church? Do you come to get things? An experience?

[26 : 16] A fill up for the week? When you relate to others, what are you looking for? Paul calls us to look for partnership in the gospel as we relate to others in church.

Paul calls us together to remember the gospel as we gather in worship. Paul calls us to seek to be a blessing to one another.

Pouring out our lives, not because of what we're getting, but because of what we can give as we gather together. Because you know what? When we do that, we actually see the gospel is sweet.

We actually see that what Jesus has done for us is so wonderful. So not only do we have an affirmation of gospel friendship, not only do we have an expression of gospel affection, but finally 9 through 11, we have a relationship that's directed by a gospel agenda.

Look with me at 9 through 11. Paul said, hey, every time I pray for you, I'm so thankful. And then in verses 9 through 11, he says, and this is the content of my prayer for you. This is the thing that I really want for you.

[27 : 30] And friends, I want you to recognize how remarkable this is. Because I just, if you stop and think, what do you pray about? You pray about your circumstances.

You pray about the people who you love who are in hard situations. You pray for things to be easier and better in your life. You pray maybe for global problems to be solved or mitigated.

There are all sorts of things that we can pray about. And you know what? It's not bad to pray for those things. But what I want you to see is when Paul prays, he has a gospel agenda for us. Look at it again.

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 Jesus.

Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. That could be a 10-week sermon series. What an awesome prayer. And so rich in so many ways.

[28 : 34] But let me, I want you to walk through it. But he's saying, I pray ultimately that you may pursue God's best in your life.

That you may approve and see what is excellent and live according to it. What God has planned for you in your life as he has rescued you from sin and called you into his kingdom.

And this is what he longs for the Philippians to have. And so working back from that, the excellent is expressed, right?

Through living for God. And so things like moral purity, right? Blamelessness. That could be translated in a different way.

Single-minded and not doing anything that would be offensive or stumbling to others. Being single-minded in your pursuit of not trying to live with, God, what can I get away with and still be okay?

[29 : 37] But saying, God, how can I put all of my energies into living a life that is for you? With the focus of an athlete who says, I'm going to cut everything out of my life that doesn't help me be the most excellent athlete.

God calls his people to have this focus on, is everything I'm doing displaying and showing Jesus Christ?

Do I see it in how I use my money? Do I see it in how I use my sex? Do I see it in how I use my power? Do I see it in how I relate to other people? With kindness, gentleness, or with demanding self-centeredness?

That you may pursue God's best in all of these different ways. This is the fruit of righteousness that God has given us in Jesus Christ. That we have a standing before God that doesn't just put us in a position, but it actually has the power to transform our lives.

So that we have something new to live for. And then working backwards from that, he says that your love may abound more and more with all discernment and knowledge.

[30 : 53] And this is part of how we see what God's best is. Right? That we would pursue a life of love, which sounds really good. But you know, friends, it's so easy for us to have a life of love that has nothing to do with the biblical picture.

Because we either want to love without truth, which just is, I unconditionally accept you and you can do whatever you want, no matter how destructive or ungodly or unhelpful.

And I'm just going to accept you because that's what love is. Or we can have the opposite in the church, particularly this can be dangerous, where we have just truth.

I have knowledge and discernment. I'm going to tell you exactly what's wrong with you all the time. Every time I see it, I'm going to point it out to you. And what Paul is saying is, no, I want you to have a love that is filled with knowledge and discernment.

So that you may be able to see God's best. And as you're coming alongside one another, as we're pursuing, running this race together of life in the gospel and for the gospel.

[32 : 01] That our hearts may be captured and transformed by the work of God in Christ, by the gospel itself. And then it may overflow in a changed life where we actually are able to live differently because of what God has given us.

Friends, this is what Paul longs for, for his friends in the gospel. It's not okay for Paul to say, hey, I'm glad you're in the camp.

Good enough. Paul says, I long that you will increase more and more, that you will grow more and more. Don't, don't stay where you are. A gospel partnership doesn't allow people to say, ah, it's okay.

Yes, there's lots of room for struggle. There's lots of room for progress and even sometimes dramatic failure in the midst of that. But the, but the agenda and the goal is growth and Christ-likeness and reflecting these things.

And ultimately, the glory and praise of God. Which is where we begin, right? A gospel partnership begins with God bringing us together.

[33 : 13] And its, and its end is that as God does this work in us, we are to the praise and glory of God. That we encourage one another by our lives, by our partnership together.

That God is proclaimed to the world together by how we do this. And friends, we're freed from a life of contractual relationships.

We don't come to church thinking, what am I going to get out of it? And if I'm getting enough, it's worth it. And if not, I don't know, maybe I'll stay home and watch Seinfeld reruns tonight. But instead, you're coming because this is the partnership of the gospel.

And you know, if you're here tonight and you're exploring Christianity. And you may have had some really bad church experiences. All I can say is, this is what God's design is.

And this is what we want to be. And this is what he's called us to be. And the very center of it is God's work for us in Jesus. Because you know, friends, this kind of partnership in the gospel where we're freed from selfishness.

[34 : 23] To just love. To just love, not because we're getting anything, but to just love. The only way we do that is because of the one who has worked in us already.

When we get to Philippians 2, we'll see it so clearly. Jesus had every privilege of divinity. Every privilege of being the second person of the Godhead of the Trinity.

He sat in heaven and throne. And yet he humbled himself. Submitted himself to his Father. Took on human flesh. Made himself a servant.

And then went to the cross for us. He wasn't selfish. He gave of his very life for us.

The very beginning and the end of the gospel partnership is because we have a Savior who has done this for us. He calls us to walk in those footsteps as we relate to one another.

[35 : 29] Because he who brought us together is the one who has shown us how to do it. And given us the power to do it. And so as we begin this series on the book of Philippians, as we talk about what does it mean for Christ in me to be the most important thing.

To count all things as lost for the sake of knowing Christ. So that we may stand firm in the gospel. Part of where Paul begins is gospel partnership.

Let's do this together. Let's pursue this together for God's glory. Let me pray. God, we love you. Lord, we thank you for the work of Christ.

Lord, we pray tonight that you would unroot our selfishness. Lord, and our self-absorbed relationships. Lord, that you would help us to know what it means to engage in this gospel partnership.

Lord, and to do it knowing that we can't do this in our own strength. But to know that you can do this in us as we trust and rely on you. Lord, we pray that you would do this, Lord, for your praise and your glory.

[36 : 49] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.