

Joy in Prayer
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Philippians 1:1-11

Opening: What kinds of things do you desire for a close friend? Think specifically about a brother or sister in Christ. Beyond day-to-day needs, what would you ask God to do for them in their life with Christ?

In the Apostle Paul's letter to his friends and partners in the church at Philippi he communicated many important things. This little letter (which can be read in about 15 minutes) was basically a missionary update and thank you note but Paul covered much more. He encouraged unity in the church and warned against selfish ambition. He held Christ up as the ultimate example and encouraged them to grow more like Him. He coached them to press on in their Christian life and warned about false teachers. Philippians also contains "go-to" passages about rising above worry and anxiety and being content with God's will.

That's a lot of truth in a short letter but if we boiled this book down to one idea the word would be "joy." The theme of joy is ironic because Paul was writing while under "house arrest" in Rome waiting to appear before Caesar.

In the opening greeting of the letter Paul expressed his affection, appreciation and spiritual desire for this church he founded over a decade earlier.

Here is the truth that should change us: The richness of life in Christ comes from relationship with other Christ-followers. Those relationships can bring a smile to our faces, a prayer to our lips, and put joy in our hearts!

Imagine a church leader standing and reading this passage to the congregation:

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: **2**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **3** I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, **4** always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, **5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. **6** And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. **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. **8** For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. **9** And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, **10** so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, **11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

- Verse one is the standard form of greeting in a letter.
- Verse two is also a typical opening for Paul's letters but it wasn't an empty "Hallmark" greeting. It was a prayer that God would give these dear people the grace and peace that only comes through following Christ.
- Grace (undeserved favor from God) saves us (Eph. 2:8) and implants in Christ-followers the peace that He has secured eternal life for us.
- Verse three begins an especially warm section of the letter: *"Every time I think of you, I give thanks to God and my prayer is filled with joy."*
- The mere thought of this congregation put a smile on Paul's face and prayer on his heart. Their memory brought him JOY even in prison.
- Right now, pause and imagine the faces of Christian friends and family members who put a smile on your face and a prayer in your heart!
- When they cross your mind do you pause and thank God for them?
- Paul was imagining faces too! If we have read Acts 16 we might guess he's thinking of faces like those of Lydia and her prayer group by the river, a young demon-possessed woman delivered

from slavery and fortune telling, and there's that Philippian jailer who was gloriously saved.

- Paul called this congregation “partners” in the gospel. True they had sent him financial support, but this was deeper than just a few love offerings. In verse seven Paul said, “*you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God...*” They shared a Christ connection.
- How can a “mega-church” like ours be not much different than attending a ball game or concert? Why is it unhealthy to only attend worship services and have no other involvement with fellow Christ-followers?
- It's fun to find friends who have things in common with you. When what you have in common is the love of Christ it is a higher level of relationship.
- Are you saying all my Christian friends should be “bff's” or “hang out” friends? I'm not saying you'll go on vacation with every Christian friend, but we WILL all be going to Heaven together!
- How should we pray for fellow followers? Let's look at Paul's example.
- Verse six is packed with encouragement! “*I am CONFIDENT God will finish what He started in your life*” by the time you see Jesus face to face.
- Paul didn't say, “*I know Jesus is proud of such wonderful people like you.*”
- Paul didn't say, “*Just keep attending and giving and God will be pleased.*”
- How DID Paul say the path to spiritual growth works? How could Paul be so confident for their growth? Where did his confidence come from?
- How about us? How often do we give this kind of encouragement to fellow followers? How can we say this same thing to them with confidence?
- Skip to verse eleven. Paul prays that they will be “*filled with the fruit of righteousness.*” Let's consider an illustration about spiritual fruit.
- If I plant a fruit tree or vine under the right conditions I can be confident fruit will come. How much fruit will depend on the conditions, but we can expect some fruit. If I bring a tomato

plant home, shake off the dirt and lean it against the garage door I am confident there will be NO fruit.

- Jesus said in John 15:5: “...I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”ⁱⁱ
- What a wonderful thing to share with a discouraged fellow follower who is wondering if they have what it takes to grow more like Christ!
- Plant yourself in the soil of His grace. Take in the hydration and nutrition of His word. Bask in the sunlight of His love and mercy. Soon your roots will grow in the direction of those other fruit trees (followers) around you and God will produce the fruit. Just BE a branch and He will be the vine.
- If someone is truly saved and following Christ as His Spirit leads them I am confident that God, “*who began the good work*” in them will finish it.
- How often do we encourage each other with that truth?
- Verse eight: Paul loved them and longed for them with the “*tender compassion of Christ.*” That is a picture of unity among Christ-followers.
- What kinds of things cause church people to fight with one another?
- [Warren Wiersbe’s illustration with two wooden blocks.]
- When we’re moving in the same direction by following Christ’s teaching there will be minimal friction with fellow followers.
- I think of that old hymn, “Blessed Be the Tie That Binds”

*1 Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds
is like to that above.*

*2 Before our Father's throne
we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
our comforts and our cares.*

*3 We share our mutual woes,
our mutual burdens bear,
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.ⁱⁱⁱ*

- Wiersbe writes: *“Christian love is ‘the tie that binds.’ Love is the evidence of salvation: ‘We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren’ (1 John 3:14). It is the ‘spiritual lubrication’ that keeps the machinery of life running smoothly.”*^{iv}
- We might say, *“I get it, but even some Christians really get on my nerves! I have a hard time having compassion for them.”* Paul said the *“tender compassion”* he had for these people came from Jesus, not from him.
- This love from Christ, through Paul, and for them was really deep!
- The KJV makes the point in graphic language: *“I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.”*^v If we’re not loving our fellow followers with the love of Christ we need to do a “gut check.”
- In verses 9-11 Paul tells us how we should pray for fellow followers.
 - **That your love (from Christ and for others) will overflow.** Agapē love “involves putting others before oneself (2:3–4.)”^{vi}
 - **You will keep growing in knowledge and understanding of what really matters.** Christian love is “discerning.” We don’t overlook moral failure or false teaching just to “keep peace.” As one commentator wrote: *“How often the church today has refused to stand against doctrinal error because someone argued that we must be loving...No one believed more firmly in love than Paul, and yet he did not hesitate to rebuke a fellow apostle for compromising the truth (Gal. 2:11–21). Paul did this because he understood that love and truth are not enemies. The most loving thing we can do is stand for the truth in a loving way.”*^{vii} Christian love is discerning.
 - **So that you can live pure and blameless lives until Christ returns.** Not sinless, but blameless and with pure motives. None of us will be perfect until we see Jesus, but we should pray for each other to have pure motives and live blameless lives in His power.
 - **You will always be filled with the fruit of salvation and the righteous character produced in your life by**

Jesus Christ. (See our thoughts above on the encouragement of verse six.)

- **That your life will bring much glory and praise to God.** I hope we are praying that for ourselves AND for our fellow followers.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- We can't form deep relationships by simply attending a worship service. That's why we need to be in small groups and active in the various ministries of the church. That's when fellow spectators turn into friends.
- Do you have those kinds of relationships? Ask God to lead you to them.
- As my grandmother would say, *"To have a friend you have to be a friend."* We need to reach out to others with the "tender compassion of Christ."
- Pray for them about more than just urgent needs. Ask God to help them grow in Christ the way verses 9-11 describe.
- The richness of life in Christ comes from relationship with other Christ-followers. Those relationships can bring a smile to our faces, a prayer to our lips, and put joy in our hearts!

ⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Php 1:7). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Jn 15:5). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ https://hymnary.org/text/blest_be_the_tie_that_binds John Fawcett (1782)

^{iv} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 65). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^v [The Holy Bible: King James Version](#). (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version., Php 1:8). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

^{vi} Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Php 1:9). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

^{vii} Ellsworth, R. (2004). [Opening up Philippians](#) (p. 20). Leominster: Day One Publications.