

Twenty-Eight Days in Philippians

Study One: Days One to Seven

Philippians 1:1-22

You may begin days one and two by reviewing the Philippians background paper sent with this first study.

Day Three

- 1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:
- 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3 I thank my God every time I remember you.

V. 1 – Paul and Timothy weren't "into" titles, I guess. They simply identified themselves as servants of Jesus. I wonder if modern church life wouldn't be better served if all leaders followed that strategy. Plus they addressed their letter to all the people, including the leaders. I have heard some say that to invest in the leadership of a church is to invest in all the people. To some extent that's true, but the saints aren't often the recipients of this "trickle down" ministry. Paul wanted to directly impact the people while including leadership.

I used to sit in a church where all the leaders sat in the first three rows so that they could benefit from this special prayer ministry. The people who weren't numbered among the leaders sat behind the leaders and were often bypassed. I wonder what Paul would have thought of that practice.

This is the only epistle where the leadership is mentioned along with the people. So whatever Paul had to say, he must have wanted the leaders to pay special attention.

V. 2 – Grace and peace are what Paul sent in this introduction. But it wasn't a peace or grace Paul could offer. It was sent through the Father and Jesus. Paul didn't send wisdom, spiritual gifts, or other spiritual things. He sent them grace and peace. Perhaps that is what you and I should dispense as we work in the church and the world. Are you a dispenser of God's grace and peace? Do you have this grace and peace? You can't give what you don't have or understand.

V. 3 – Paul had a "love affair" with the Philippian church. It was obvious that this church was among his favorites. Paul had a difficult ministry but the Philippians brought him joy whenever he remembered them. I want to have that effect on people, but that hasn't always been the case. In fact, I think some have worked hard to forget me, let alone remember me with joy! What would it take for you to always be remembered with thanksgiving by someone else? Perhaps Paul remembered his stay in Lydia's home or how the Philippian jailer washed his wounds after he was flogged by the officials. Whatever had transpired between Paul and the Philippians, it certainly forged a close bond between them.

Day Four

- 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy
5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,
6 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.
7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my
heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of
you share in God's grace with me.
8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Vs. 4&5 – Paul prayed for the Philippians with joy. I wonder if this means that Paul prayed for some others, but there was no joy in his prayers? I am reflecting on my own prayer life to see what it would take to pray for someone with joy. I think they would be people with whom I went through difficult times, or who went out of their way to serve me, or who were selfless in their approach to life and ministry.

Paul was a partner with the Philippians. He is not reminding them of his authority or superiority to them. He is reminiscing about their partnership, how God brought them together and worked in their lives jointly to build a partnership. Who are your partners with in the gospel? Who are your most significant relationships and why? What are you prepared to do to make these partnerships even better. Later we find out that there were financial ties between the Philippians and Paul. They also sent an emissary to check on Paul's well-being. And Paul prayed for them. This was not just some feeling between this church and the apostle. This was a relationship of love that was proven through love actions.

V. 6 – One of my most significant insights as a pastor was that I was **not** the Holy Spirit to the people in the church I pastored. They belonged to God and He was their shepherd. I didn't have to finish the work He had begun in them; He could do that. God will finish the good work He has begun in you. We are all projects under construction. I may not be happy where I am at in the construction process, or with where you are at spiritually. But God will finish the work and I should have confidence, not in you or me, but in Him. So I accept you not only for where you **are**, but where you **will be** in your journey with God.

V. 7 – It is obvious that the Philippians and Paul were joined with spiritual ties. He carried them all in his heart and consequently, whatever he went through, they went through it with him. Who has God joined you to spiritually?

Paul was busy defending and confirming the gospel. "Defending and confirming." While God needs no defense or confirmation, it is part of apostolic ministry to advance and establish truth, and then conduct spiritual warfare to see as many lives "captured" for the gospel as possible. And part of this had to be done as he sat in chains in a Roman jail.

I am struck by the tone of this epistle as compared to Paul's letter to Corinth, which was much more combative and tense. Obviously Paul founded this church, but he wrote gently and with such great affection. Paul was not writing from a high and lofty place, but rather as their partner who was walking out his faith just as they were.

V. 8 – The word for affection here is the Greek word for “bowels.” In other words, Paul had a love for the Philippians that was deep down inside him. God put this affection in Paul’s heart and so consequently he longed for his friends there. This word “bowels” is also translated “compassion” and was used in **Matthew 9:36: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”** Do you have bowels of compassion? That is something that only God can produce, but you must want it produced. How deeply do you “feel” for other people?

Day Five

- 9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,
10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,
11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God.
12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.
13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.
14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

V. 9 – The Bible is the inspired word of God. Therefore the prayers contained in the Bible are also inspired prayers. These Bible prayers would make good additions to your own prayer life. I have collected many of these prayers in one document that can be found at http://www.purposequest.com/bible_studies.htm. Feel free to download this list and pray your way through the Bible. Here Paul shared with us what he was praying for his favorite church.

It is interesting that Paul connected love with knowledge and insight. He prayed that all three would increase but that love would be the motivation. I have always found that God wants me to share my experience and insight with others. Remember, Paul was writing to the leaders **and** church members. God puts leaders (even parents) through certain experiences so they can share those lessons with His people and children. We are not to be reservoirs of God’s love, but rivers flowing out to the nations. Are you a swamp or a river? A pool or a mighty stream, full of selfishness and self-centeredness, or exhortation and encouragement in love?

V. 10 – Paul wanted the Philippians to discern what was “best.” It is often said that the good is the enemy of the best. The fact is that it is possible to know what God’s best is; it isn’t a guessing game or left up to chance. But you must grow in discernment and love to find out what it is. I am amazed at how many believers—no, let me rephrase that. **I** have been guilty of settling for second best because someone talked me into something that God never intended. What is God’s best for you? Don’t settle for anything less. Don’t listen to people; listen to God!

V. 11 – Paul set out a pattern here: love leads to discernment that will lead to what is best so that you can be filled with fruit of righteousness—and all for the praise and glory of God! In the first 11 verses, Paul mentioned Jesus six times! This letter was not about Paul; it was about Jesus. I have noticed how many times I preached a message and never mentioned Jesus by name. I guess I assumed that people would know it was ultimately about Him, but I never spoke His name! And now I've noticed how many others do it as well. I am making a conscious effort to direct all that I say toward Him and to mention His name in the process. Otherwise, I find myself talking about good things and neglecting the best thing—the Lord Jesus Christ!

V. 12 – Paul was referring to the fact that he was in prison as he wrote this letter. Perhaps the only way the Spirit could get Paul down to slow down long enough to write was to put him into chains! But Paul saw God's hand in all his circumstances. Do you? He was able to see how his imprisonment was working to further the gospel and that was Paul's ultimate objective. The Philippians were probably concerned about Paul and here he was, a prisoner, encouraging them that his circumstances were from God.

V. 13 – Tradition tells us that Paul led every one of his prison guards to faith in Christ. When the Romans would find out, they would transfer the guard, bringing a new potential convert Paul's way! They weren't too bright! But who could resist the appeal of this little scarred man who was rejoicing in chains because Jesus was being magnified! What is your perspective of your current situation? Is it like Paul's? Do you see the hand of Jesus in it all?

V. 14 – I'm not sure why, but people were actually encouraged to speak the gospel because of Paul's imprisonment. When people are presented with a picture of courage, they are often stimulated to courageous deeds themselves. Paul's courage in the midst of hardship must have said to people, "If that's what he can do in his condition, then what can I do for Jesus in mine?" That is why inspirational stories and biographies of champions for Christ should be an important part of your reading. I have always been inspired by St. Francis Assisi, Hudson Taylor and many other saints and faithful servants of God. Their stories have given me strength to walk out my own faith. Who are your heroes in the faith? What great things are you doing because of what they did?

Day Six

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.

16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

Vs. 15-18 – This passage always amazes me when I read it. There were some who were preaching Christ out of bad motives. They were trying to stir up trouble for Paul, perhaps showing that he wasn't that significant of an apostle, since they were preaching

with immunity while he was in prison. Why does this impress me? Because Paul didn't try to stop them! He was so happy that the seed of the Word was sown that he was less concerned with the motives of the sower than I would be. I heard someone say one time that if a farmer had a fight with his wife that day and then went out to plant seed, the seed would eventually sprout and grow. The sower's attitude was irrelevant; it was all about the seed.

That is true in the case of sowing gospel seed. I should rejoice when the gospel is preached even by those whom I don't like or whose style is not to my liking, for perhaps God will use that preaching to save some.

God uses many people whom I don't like, who don't look or dress the way I would want them to. All that is irrelevant. I have to stop being so concerned about the packaging and be more concerned with content. As long as the gospel is preached, why am I so concerned with peripheral issues? In fact, Jesus taught this same principle: **“Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.’ ‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. ‘No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us’” (Mark 9:38-40).**

By the way, Paul has referred to Jesus by name 10 times in the first 18 verses. There can be no doubt who Paul served. He was not starting an apostolic movement that had his name on it. He wasn't preaching Paul's doctrine of salvation. Paul was preaching Christ and rejoiced when anyone helped him do that, even if they didn't have his best interests at heart.

Paul was a happy man. He wasn't uptight over issues that really didn't matter. As was said in verse 11, he could discern the best and the best here was that the gospel was preached—Paul was achieving his life objective.

Are you happy? Why or why not?

Day Seven

19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!

V. 19 – This is quite a perspective from a man in chains! I am reminded that God never delivers us **from** trouble, but delivers us **out of** trouble. Many times I thought God came into my life to spare me trouble. He did not. In fact, trouble has taught me about God and His ability and power to save and deliver me. In the midst of his trials, Paul was hopeful and positive. Here is a man in the midst of trouble encouraging those who were not in trouble but concerned about him.

V. 20 – Paul was not ignorant of the danger he was in, and alluded to the fact that his imprisonment could lead to his death. So Paul’s interpretation of his deliverance wasn’t only a release from prison; he saw that his deliverance could have involved a release from this life! Yet he was upbeat and positive, trusting in God for the eventual outcome, whatever that was. Faith is no guarantee of the outcome that you choose or desire. It is complete trust that God will work out what’s best according to His intentions. There were others who faced death and tough times, and they knew that their outcome was in God’s hands.

“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and **he will rescue us from your hand**, O king. But **even if he does not**, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up’” (Daniel 3:16-18).

“Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, ‘Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. **Perhaps** the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few’” (1 Samuel 14:6).

“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face” (Job 13:15).

V. 21 – Paul understood that death wasn’t the end for him. It was another beginning. Many people ask me if I am afraid to travel in these troubled times. My answer is always the same. I gave my life to Jesus 30 years ago. If He chooses to claim it in my bed or on the road, that is His business, not mine. Where He leads me, I will follow. I have talked to my family and told them that if I die on some trip, I will die a happy man, doing what it is that I love to do. Death isn’t the end!

“‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

V. 22 – Paul didn’t just want to labor; he wanted to bear fruit. That should also be our goal, especially if we are leaders. And keep in mind, as we stated in the beginning, Paul singled out the Philippian leaders as he began his letter.

“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be

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given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:2-8).

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 15:16).

What is the fruit that you were created to produce? Do you know? For me, it is writing and “bringing order out of chaos,” which is my life’s purpose. What is your purpose? How can you bear fruit if you don’t know what your purpose is?

As Paul stated, it’s your choice. You can choose to live a productive, fruitful life or a selfish, fearful one. I trust that as we end this first week’s study that you will choose fruit over fear.