



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH
SERIES: TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL
SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11
DATE: MAY 3, 2026

INTRODUCTION

When people hear the word *unity*, they often think of sameness. They assume unity means same opinions, same personalities, and same preferences. But Christian unity is something deeper. It's not about being identical, but it's about being bonded around the gospel. In the book of Philippians, Paul shows us that what binds believers together isn't *personality* or *proximity*. Instead, it is about *partnering*.

This is why Paul's letter overflows with joy. Not because life is easy (Paul is writing from prison), but because he's not alone. He's part of a people who are partnering together for the gospel.

This passage pushes not simply to ask: "Am I happy?" but more so to ask: "Who am I joined to in the gospel? And how is that shaping my joy?"

Text

Philippians 1:1-11

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, ^[d] 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.

Explanation

Greeting and Background

Paul opens his letter to the Philippians with a brief and fairly standard greeting. Paul references Timothy as also sending the letter. Timothy will be referenced again in chapter 2 as someone who was genuinely concerned for their welfare (Php. 2:20)

Paul's initial visit to the Philippians is recorded in Acts 16 with a companion named Silas. This occurred on Paul's second missionary journey. Philippi was a "leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony (Acts 16:12). The first convert was a woman named Lydia. She and her household were baptized, and she provided a house for them to stay.

Paul and Silas had a brief stay in prison in Philippi. They were placed there because some owners of a slave girl became upset at them. The episode is one where the slave owners were profiting off the girl who had a spirit of

divination. When Paul cast out the spirit, the owners dragged Paul and Silas into the marketplace and accused him of disturbing the city and advocating for practices contrary to their customs. As a result, they were beaten and thrown into prison.

Despite their imprisonment, Paul and Silas prayed and worshipped the Lord through the night. Providently, an earthquake occurred, and their chains broke, and the doors were opened. When the jailor awoke, he had assumed that the prisoners escaped. Yet, Paul and Silas had decided to remain. Now experiencing conviction, the jailer asked them how he could be saved. He then believed along with his household.

The next day, Paul and Silas were released, and the magistrates asked them to leave the city. They obliged, but not before saying farewell and encouraging the new believers. It appears he was only there for a matter of days or weeks, not months or years.

Later, on Paul's third missionary journey, he appears to have stopped there most likely twice more where he provided encouragement (Acts 20:1-6).

Thanking God for people with joy

After his initial greeting, Paul begins by saying that every time he remembers the Philippians, he thanks God for them. He prays with joy for them. What stands out here is that his joy is tied directly to people. His memories of them consistently lead him into gratitude. It is interesting to note the direction of that gratitude: he doesn't merely feel thankful toward them; he expresses thanks *to God* because of them. This shows that Paul sees their relationship as something God has produced, not something that just happened naturally.

That perspective has the power to shape how we view others in the church. Instead of seeing people primarily through the lens of personality differences or past experiences, Paul sees them as evidence of God's work in his life. His joy grows as he recognizes that God has placed these people in his life for a reason. In the same way, learning to thank God for specific people can transform both our perspective and our relationships.

Partnership in the Gospel

Paul then explains the reason for his joy: their "partnership in the gospel." This partnership is more than casual association. It reflects shared

commitment, shared sacrifice, and shared purpose. The Philippians were not passive observers of Paul's ministry; they actively supported him. Philippians 4:15-16 describes their support as they "[partnered] with [Paul] in giving and receiving... [and] sent help for [his] needs once and again." We also learn of the sacrifice that a man named Epaphroditus made on behalf of the church. He delivered the support and encouraged Paul. Paul references him as a "fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need" (Php. 2:25) and how he had become "ill, near to death" (Php. 2:27). Paul's relationship was built on something far stronger than mere convenience.

What makes this even more meaningful is that Paul attributes their partnership to God's work. He expresses confidence that the God "who began this good work in them will carry it through to completion." In other words, their unity is not fragile or temporary because it does not depend solely on human effort. It is rooted in God's ongoing activity in their lives. This gives their relationship both stability and direction. It began with God, and it will be sustained by Him.

Deep Affection for One Another

As Paul continues, he defends the depth of his feelings for the Philippians, saying it is right for him to feel this way because he holds them in his heart. He describes them as "partakers of grace" with him, emphasizing that they share in the same salvation as he does. This shared experience of grace creates a bond that goes beyond ordinary friendship.

It is striking how Paul describes his affection. He says he "longs for them with the affection of Christ Jesus." It is hard to imagine a deeper way to describe his affection for them. Paul's love for them is not merely human emotion. It is empowered by Christ's love working through him. While others might have distanced themselves from Paul during his imprisonment, the Philippians remained in contact despite the distance. Their willingness to stand with him in hardship undoubtedly helped foster his deep affection for them.

Prayer

After expressing his gratitude and affection, Paul turns to prayer, asking that their love would abound more and more. However, he does not pray for love in a purely emotional sense. He wants their love to grow with knowledge and

discernment. This reveals that true Christian love is not only sincere but also wise. It is shaped by truth and guided by understanding.

Paul's goal is that this kind of love would enable them to recognize what is truly excellent, leading to lives that are pure and blameless. Ultimately, this growth results in lives that are filled with the fruit of righteousness through Christ, bringing glory and praise to God. In other words, unity is not just about staying connected—it is about growing together in maturity.

Discussion Questions

- What is the primary lens in which you view your relationships: is it in terms of your similarities, differences, and experiences or through the lens of how God is working through them in your life?
- Is there a particular person that comes to your mind that you thank God for every remembrance you have of them? Why?
- What usually holds relationships together in the world, and how is that different from gospel partnership?
- How does working toward a shared purpose affect the depth of relationships?
- What kinds of experiences tend to deepen relationships the most?
- Why might shared hardship strengthen bonds more than shared comfort?
- How comfortable are you expressing appreciation and affection to others in our church?

Conclusions or Applications

JOY IS DEEPLY CONNECTED TO SHARED GOSPEL LIFE.

This passage challenges the common idea that joy is found in individual success, comfort, or independence. Instead, it presents a different vision: joy is deeply connected to shared gospel life. Paul's joy flows from being united with others in a common purpose—to know Christ and make Him known.

This kind of relationship goes beyond surface-level connection. It requires intentional investment, consistent prayer, and a willingness to grow together. When relationships are rooted in Christ rather than convenience, they take on a depth and stability that the world cannot replicate.

The invitation of this passage is simple but profound: to move toward one another, not just socially, but spiritually. Seek to build relationships centered on the gospel. Because in the end, the deepest joy is not found in standing alone, but in standing together for something eternal.