**Lesson 3: Joy in Christian Fellowship**

Text: Philippians 1:1-11

**Introduction**

God knew what He was doing when He placed believers in a church family. He knew that we needed each other! Do you have a deep, abiding love for your church family? Our love for our fellow church members should grow through the years. In this lesson, we will see the love Paul had for the Philippian church and the love they had for him. Paul’s love was evident in that he had them in his mind, in his heart, and in his prayers. Applying this passage to our lives as members of Hillcrest Baptist Church will create a stronger bond within our Sunday school classes and throughout our church family. There is joy in Christian fellowship!

1. We were designed by God with a desire to fellowship with other believers.
   1. A joyful church is focused on relationships, not just acquaintances.
      1. God made us for meaningful connections.
      2. Hillcrest Baptist Church has a history of such connections.
   2. Could we have a closer relationship with each other within the church? Absolutely! That is one of the reasons we are studying this particular book of the Bible.
   3. The stronger our connection with the Lord, the stronger our connection with each other.
2. There was a strong bond between Paul and the believers at Philippi that he described as “fellowship in the gospel.”
   1. Fellowship to most Baptists means food! While food doesn’t hurt, it isn’t the essence of fellowship.
   2. Fellowship means to have in common.
      1. Serving Christ brought Paul and Timothy together. (v. 1a)
      2. His fellowship was with “all the saints,” not just a few. (v. 1b)
      3. The basis for their fellowship was that they were “in Christ.” (v. 1c)
      4. Spiritual leaders such as the “bishops” (pastors) and “deacons” serve for the good of the whole church. (v. 1d)
      5. Those who are in fellowship are recipients of “grace” and “peace.” (v. 2)
   3. A simple reading of Paul’s introductory comments to the Philippians demonstrates their joyful fellowship with each other.
3. Those who are in fellowship think often of each other. (v. 3-6)
   1. He wrote to them at a time when he could have easily succumbed to self-centeredness.
   2. He gave thanks upon every thought of them. (v. 3)
      1. He thought of them often. (v. 4a)
      2. He had pleasant thoughts toward them. (v. 4b)
   3. Their common bond in Christ and participation in the gospel ministry caused him to think of them with joy. (v. 5)
   4. He was confident that God was at work in their lives. (v. 6)
   5. Not only did he think about them, but he let them *know* that he was thinking about them by sending a letter.
   6. Do you think about the members of our Sunday school class and let them know?
4. Those who are in fellowship care deeply for each other. (v. 7-8)
   1. Paul had them in his heart. Those who are dear to you are often on your heart.
      1. Love is the trademark for believers. (1 John 3:14)
      2. Paul loved them as fellow recipients of grace. (v. 7b)
      3. Our mutual need for God’s grace brings us together as a church family.
   2. He had a deep, abiding love for them. (v. 8)
      1. God knew his heart toward his fellow believers. (v. 8a)
      2. Paul’s love came from the Lord. (v. 8b)
         1. The reference to “bowels” refers to the innermost part of man. It conveys the idea of heartfelt emotions.
         2. It is a joyful experience to love those Jesus loves with His love!
5. Those who are in fellowship pray earnestly for each other. (v. 9-11)
   1. Paul prayed that their love might abound. (v. 9-10a)
      1. Their love was to be abundant and prominent. (v. 9a)
      2. Those who are ruled by love make choices that are best for others. (v. 9b-10a)
   2. He prayed that they might be sincere. (v. 10b)
      1. “Sincere” literally means to be tested by sunlight. Potters heated clay vessels in a furnace. Due to intense heat, some of the vessels cracked. Not wanting to lose profit, some potters filled the cracks with wax. If a vessel was in mint condition, it was said to be “sincere” or without wax. You could hold it up to the light to see for yourself that it was sound.
      2. Paul wanted the Philippians to pass the test. He wanted them to be real.
   3. He prayed that they might be “without offense”. They were to live a blameless life in preparation to stand before the Lord. (v. 10c)
   4. They would be prepared to stand before the Lord if their lives were filled with righteousness. (v. 11)
6. Central Idea: Paul’s fellowship with the church in Philippi was manifest by his thoughtfulness, loving care, and prayer for their spiritual growth.
7. Application – Our fellowship Hillcrest Baptist Church should be manifest by thoughtfulness, loving care, and prayer for each other.
   1. If your joy is in Christ, you will have positive thoughts toward your church family.
   2. If your joy is in Christ, you will care deeply about your church family.
   3. If your joy is in Christ, you will gladly pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ.
   4. Contact someone this week to let them know that you are thinking about them and praying for them. It may be a member of your class. It could be a new member of our church. Perhaps you could contact one of our missionaries. It will be a great blessing and encouragement to them! It was to Paul and the Philippians.

**Conclusion**

It is evident that Paul had strong feelings for his brothers and sisters in Philippi. He had them in his mind, in his heart, and in his prayers. Joy is produced when believers care for each other in this same way. Ask the Lord to give you a greater love for our church family. Ask Him to give you the love He has for our church family. Pick up the church directory this week and pray for our church. Find joy in Christian fellowship.