

SESSION 1

Unit 1

Philippians

Session Outcome

To recognize, understand, and encourage partnerships in ministry within the church.

Customize:

is the password to access expanded teaching helps at SundayTeacher.com.

Discover:



See *Illustrated Bible Life* for an insightful look into Paul's finances, and verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

March

3

I HAVE YOU IN MY HEART

Our partnership with other believers in ministry is vital to the life of the church.

THE WORD

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-8

KEY VERSE

I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴**In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy** ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:14-19

¹⁴Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. ¹⁷Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Last Week:

We examined the way in which the life of the follower of Jesus is marked by humble thanksgiving, not arrogant boasting.

This Week:

We will explore the importance of the partnerships we share with other believers.

Notes:

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ENGAGE THE WORD

Do you remember any of your “partners in mischief” from high school or college? What grand adventures did you go on? What experiences did you share? What sort of experiences did Paul have with the Philippians that he would write, “I thank my God every time I remember you”(Philippians 1:3) and “In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with you...”(v. 4)? At times, the book of Philippians almost sounds like a love letter. Some of the language is typical of friendship letters for Paul’s day, but Paul does express strong feelings of gratitude, joy, longing, and love. Paul and the Philippians had a relationship built on many experiences together.

Some of the first adventures in ministry that Paul had with the church in Philippi may be read in Acts, chapter 16. Beyond these stories and clues in the letter, we are left with nothing but our imaginations to consider what memories Paul made with the Philippians.

The friendship between Paul and the Philippians is not just built off memories of the past. The friendship is not like a reunion, where folks retell the same stories year after year after year. However, in this relationship new stories are being written. Their friendship is continuing to grow, because it is built around a mission. Paul describes their relationship as one of being “partners in the gospel.” The reason Paul and the Philippians remain in each other’s hearts is not just a sentimentality for their past triumphs and trials, but because their journey together continues even while miles apart.

Part of what keeps the ministry relationship ongoing is the fact that Paul continues to pray for the Philippians. Sometimes our colleagues and the folks we work with are ironically the ones we can forget to pray for. For Paul, remembering his partners leads to thanksgiving, and thanksgiving reminds him to pray for them.

▶ Watch:

Dr. Sharpes introduces the study of the book of Philippians, as well as, our session for today.

🔊 Listen:

Paul's financial situation is the focus of this week's *Illustrated Bible Life* podcast on SundayTeacher.com.

Notes:

Did You Know?
Paul takes the traditional way of writing "hello" in the ancient world, "charein," and alters it to read "charis," which is Greek for grace or loving-kindness!

Philippians 1:3-6
Joy is a common theme throughout Philippians. The joy that Paul speaks of does not rely on positive circumstances; Paul experienced joy even in the midst of being in prison. Paul points out that joy during desperate times is possible because of our relationship with God.

The source for Paul's joy is two-fold. First, he prays with joy because the Philippians give him joy. There is something about working as a team toward the same goals that brings a deep satisfaction in relationships. Second, God is the source of Paul's joy, and more specifically Paul's belief that God is part of the teamwork as well. Paul derives joy in knowing that God will take the project to completion no matter what happens. Paul and the Philippians do not have to worry because God is doing the work. This good work is being done in both Paul and the Philippians. Dear to Wesleyan-holiness theology is the thought that God is continuing to make us into a holy people. We become more Christlike as we allow God to continue to work on us as we surrender our lives to Him. Paul reminds us that from the moment of salvation until we pass into glory (or Christ returns), He never stops working on us.

Partners in prayer. We have all heard this phrase. Often it is used like this: Well if you can't give, you can always pray. Prayer, however, is not an activity to be taken up only when we cannot give money. It is clear the Philippians had learned how to be persistent, praying Christians. Paul knew they had kept praying for him and for the success of the gospel. In our Christian walk and warfare, we really do need to pray persistently for each other and all who fight the Lord's battles. Always remember that prayer is a powerful force!

SOURCE OF JOY

PARTNERS IN PRAYER

PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL

Philippians 1:7-8
Being "partners in the gospel" binds people not only together to one another, but also to Christ. Consider

Discover:

The apostle Paul was a great missionary and theologian in the early church. Yet, it is easy to overlook the fact that Paul had the same daily financial concerns as we do. How did Paul pay for his food, lodgings, and travel? How did he afford his books and parchments? This week's *Illustrated Bible Life* article sheds some light on "Paul's Financial Support."

Notes:

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Think About It
Philippians is known as the epistle of joy. Can you count how many times Paul uses the word joy? Consider the different ways Paul uses the word in Philippians 1:4, 1:18, 1:25, 2:2, 2:17, 2:28, 2:29, 3:1, 4:1, and 4:10.

Paul and the Philippians' partnership. Christ had been their matchmaker, pulling them together in the first place. Christ had been their goal. Christ had enabled their triumphs. Their relationship with Christ had also been the cause of their sufferings. And all their present business of letters, gifts, reports, and challenges laid out in the letter to the Philippians was for the gospel of Christ. It is with such a focus and interrelationship with Christ that Paul can write that he longs for the Philippians with "all the affections of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:8). It is possible to love others like Jesus loves others. This too is a joyful possibility in Christ!

As believers, the body of Christ, we are also "partners in grace." Whether in suffering for the sake of Christ or defending and confirming the gospel, we have a common bond held together by our relationship with Jesus Christ.

PARTNERSHIP

Philippians 4:14-19

Fast forwarding to the last part of chapter four, before the letter's final closing, again reveals what a gospel partnership looks like. First, partners in the gospel share their troubles with one another. They share emotionally and physically. They are a listening ear as well as a helping hand in the work of ministry. Second, partners in the gospel give financially to the work of ministry. They give support when and where it is needed. Finally, there is the idea of an ongoing relationship with all those that are working in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. The relationship continues even as seasons change and people move!

REFLECT

Think about your partners in the gospel. Take time this week to thank God for those people.

HUNTER DALE CUMMINGS was called to pastor after teaching a Bible study on Philippians his junior year of High School. He pastors Harvest Community Church of the Nazarene right outside Atlanta, GA.

Discussion Guide



Connect to My Experience

Popular entertainment often relies on partnerships. Whether in books, movies or television, you often find partners working together. You may have a famous superhero and faithful friend, like Batman and Robin, crime dramas include famous detectives and companions like Sherlock Holmes and Watson, even comedy shows include friends who share life together like Laurel and Hardy. A partner might be a “sidekick” who supplements the main character, or a co-equal who balances out the partnership.

- Can you name some famous partnerships you have seen in books, movies, or on television?
- Do you ever wonder how partners get together and what keeps them together in difficult times? What gives them joy? In other words, what holds their partnership together?
- What is the difference between someone who is a “sidekick” and someone who is seen as a true partner in a key aspect of life?

Transition:

Being invited into a partnership provides an important backdrop to the session this week. As we listen to God’s Word, what does it say about the nature of true partnerships?



Connect to the Word

Invite someone to read Philippians 1:3-8, then discuss the following,

When Paul “gives thanks” as he “remembers” the Philippians in this passage, he is using similar phrases that many Christians associate with when they gather together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Paul appears to be tying their ongoing support of his ministry alongside their continued “partnership” in spreading the message of the gospel.

- What comes to mind when you think about what it means to be in “partnership” with other believers?
- How does our partnership with other believers produce joy in our lives?
- In what ways do partnerships strengthen the ministry of the church body?

Paul’s prayer asks for God’s “good work” to be complete both in the believers and through the message of the gospel.

- In what ways might Paul’s words in verse 6 be an encouragement to these believers? (God forgave their sins and was working through their lives. God restores and continues to transform.)
- In what ways does God carry on His work in and through us? (Through the Holy Spirit, God works in and through those who are open to His leading in their lives.)

Note that Paul says in verse 7 that whether he is in chains, or defending and confirming the gospel, they all share God’s grace with him.

- How do you think Paul viewed his relationship with these people? (Despite the circumstance he was facing, they were his partners in ministry.)

Paul says that he “longs” for them with the affection of Christ.

- In what ways does our love for Christ impact our relationship with other believers? (Our beliefs are a common bond. We love and treat them as Christ would love and treat them.)
- In what ways does our love for Christ impact our relationship with those outside the church? (We are examples of what it means to express Christlike love toward others. See John 13:35.)

Insight

We are all called to be true partners in Christ, allowing God to do everything in us, and provide what we need, in order to empower us to participate together in spreading the gospel.

- What are some practical and tangible ways we can express our affection for fellow believers?

Paul's partnership rests with the church, not just specific leaders or personal friends. In our very individualistic society, Paul seems countercultural in his desire to include a larger fellowship as co-laborers. "We" are partners in the gospel.

- Why is it important to keep in mind the whole (everyone in the body) church when we think of our partnerships in the gospel? (We are all one in the body in Christ, not with only a select few.)
- What are the strengths of focusing on God accomplishing His work in a church body, as well as in individuals? (We must work together to accomplish the work of God. We are stronger together.)
- How do we foster relationships with those outside our circle of friends within our church body?

Invite someone to read Philippians 4:14-19, then discuss the following,

It is important to see that Paul seeks what the Philippians "need," but not necessarily what they "want." Partners often seek the best for each other, even when they do not realize what that best might be. For Paul, the answer always seems to revolve around the work that Christ is doing in the Philippians.

- In what ways can we "share in the troubles" of others? (Listening, helping in tangible ways, praying, etc.)
- Why is it important for us to seek what people need rather than just what they want?
- How does allowing Jesus to be at work in our lives make a difference in how we determine our wants (or our desires) from what we really need?



Connect to My Life and the World

Paul's "remembrance" of the Philippians' ministry emerges from their common partnership "in Christ." Elements of that ministry include both prayer and action. Seeking God and serving others.

- If Paul was to invite us into a partnership, what would that partnership be? Are there specific ways our group might pray for others? Are there particular actions, as a group, we might do for others? If so, what?
- If you were to pray a prayer of thanksgiving for our group, what might that prayer be? What are particular ways that we can pray for people in our group and in the church body?
- What particular ministries can we participate in together for the sake of the gospel? Depending on your answer, might God be inviting you into new ways to pray and minister as a partner "in Christ"?

Close in prayer, thanking God for the partners we have in the church body.

Sessions 1-5 are written by Dean Blevins

Dean serves as professor of Practical Theology and Christian Discipleship at Nazarene Theological Seminary. He has contributed to several books and published over 60 church-related or scholarly articles. Dean currently resides in Olathe, KS with his wife JoAnn.