

Joy in Relationships

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 August 2025

Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, Philippians 1, 1 to 11.! Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi,! together with the overseers and deacons.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

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. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you since I have you in my heart.

And whenever I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Amen. Let's pray and ask for God's help.

[1 : 41] As we look at these verses together. Thank you, our God, for your word to us. And we pray now that by your spirit, you would teach us and point us to Jesus, your son, our savior.

For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, what is the aim of life or what is the aim of your life? For most people, it is to enjoy life and to be happy, isn't it?

Life's aim, ambition, hope, purpose, goal is to be happy. People want to be happy. And that's why life for so many is up with pursuing happiness and with seeking joy.

Popular media and social media tap into this human desire. And that's why we continually get advice on health, food, fitness, family, sex, relationships, fashion, money, work, and so on and so on.

And the message is that if you have these things in the right measure, then you'll be happy. You'll be happy if you have a healthier body. You'll be happy if you have a better fitness regime.

[2 : 58] You'll be happy if you've got a good diet, a better wardrobe, more money, enough sex, better relationships, a secure family, fulfilling job, a nicer house, the right gadgets, and so on and so on.

But the problem is that whilst all of these things promise happiness, they often bring despair.

Because for all our efforts to pursue happiness through good circumstances, we still continue to struggle, be hurt, get lonely, sad, depressed, are discouraged, are overwhelmed.

And what we're depending on fails to deliver. And so what's the answer to this human pursuit for lasting happiness and for true joy?

Well, today we begin this new series in Paul's letter to the Philippians. And Philippians is a letter from the Apostle Paul, and it is overflowing with joy. That's why we've called our series True Joy. True Joy because it speaks of a joy that goes way beyond mere surface-level happiness. And it's that surface-level happiness that our world chases after.

[4 : 14] But this joy that we find in Philippians and in the Bible is not dependent on our life circumstances being good. And the Apostle Paul himself, who is the author of this letter, is a prime example of this because he wrote the letter to the church in Philippi when he was in prison, probably in Rome about AD 61.

And so he had nothing, as he sat in his prison cell, nothing that this world says you need to make you happy or to experience joy.

Because the reality for Paul was that he was chained up and facing the prospect of death. And yet, despite this, he wrote this letter to his Philippian friends that is bursting with joy and rejoicing.

In fact, the words joy and rejoice are repeated over and over. They come from the same word group. And they appear 14 times in this short letter.

Because we'll see that true joy, real joy, is rooted not in our circumstances of this life, but is rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[5 : 25] He is the source of true and lasting joy. And we'll discover this as we look through Philippians, whether we call ourselves a Christian or not.

And so just before we dig in to the letter itself, let me make a few comments by way of introduction. Because the background for Paul's letter to the Ephesians is found in Acts chapter 16.

And it's in Acts 16 that we read about how this church in Philippi started, how it was planted. And it was planted around AD 50. So the Apostle Paul is writing to this church after it's been in existence for around 10 years.

And it was the first church that was planted in present-day Europe or north of Greece. And Acts 16 gives this beautiful account of how three different people come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ from three different backgrounds.

So there was this woman called Lydia. And Lydia was a wealthy businesswoman who opened up her home to Paul and to the missionaries. And then there was a slave girl who is unnamed.

[6 : 37] But she was possessed by a demon. And so Lydia came to Jesus Christ quietly. But the slave girl came to Jesus dramatically. And it was this slave girl's conversion that resulted in fierce opposition for Paul and the missionaries.

They were attacked and beaten and sent to jail. And so that's when they come into contact with a man who's just simply called the Philippian jailer. He was a hardened man.

And yet he was converted to Jesus Christ as well. And so these three people basically became the core group for the church plant in Philippi. Probably not your dream or ideal church planting team.

But they were the beginning not just of the church in Philippi, but the beginning of the church in Europe. And so before we move on, it's just worth noting, given the circumstances of the people in Philippi, that anyone's life can be transformed by Jesus Christ.

You just can't write anyone off, whoever they are. Even if you're here today and you're thinking, I'm just not really the Christian type.

[7 : 52] Christianity is for other people. Jesus is for other people. But I would never be a follower of Jesus. Or I could never be a follower of Jesus.

The reality is when you read the Bible and you read the book of Acts and you read the letter to the Philippians that anyone's life can be transformed by Jesus Christ. And so as we come to Philippians, it's clear that this is a congregation that was close to the Apostle Paul's heart.

In chapter 4, verse 1, Paul calls them, My joy and my crown. In fact, Philippians is the only church that he writes to where he's not trying to either correct false teaching or to rebuke sexual immorality and sinful behavior.

The Philippians could be considered a healthy gospel church. In fact, part of his reason for writing was to express his thanks to them for their financial support of Paul and his ministry.

But of course, no church is perfect. And so when Paul wrote to them, it had been over 10 years since he'd been there and the church was planted. And Paul couldn't visit them because he was stuck in prison.

[9 : 06] And so he writes to them with this warm pastoral affection because he needed to. Because despite all of their strengths, there were internal disputes.

You see this in the beginning of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 4, internal disputes. And there was also external opposition. And you see this at the beginning of chapter 3.

And it's really no different today when it comes to church. No matter how healthy a church appears to be on the surface, there's always the danger of internal disputes and of external opposition.

And that's why Paul urges the Philippians to unity as they conduct themselves, as he says, in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

And so we'll see this as we go through the letter. But for the rest of our time, let's look at verses 1 to 11 in chapter 1 and see how there is joy in relationships.

[10 : 07] Because from the very beginning of this letter, it's clear that Paul has got a special relationship with the Philippians. And so it gives us a model for how believers are to relate to one another.

How leaders are to relate to the congregation and how members are to relate to one another. Because what we read here is actually so different from how relationships function in our world today.

Our culture is an individualistic culture. And relationships are thin. We have this term that sociologists use called expressive individualism, which characterizes our culture with its slogans, you be you, or be true to yourself, or find yourself, or follow your heart.

And it's preached everywhere. On TV, in films, through advertising, in education, at school, in university, in popular literature, and it's all over social media.

Expressive individualism. You do what's best for you. Never mind anybody else. It doesn't matter about your family. It doesn't matter about community. As long as you are happy.

[11 : 24] And so our culture demands that any kind of relationship should basically be transactional. It's provisional, as long as it's profitable for you, but it should never be permanent.

And yet that is not how relationships are meant to be in Christ's church. Because our union with Christ transforms our relationships with Christ's people.

And so let's see this in Paul's words. We're going to look at just three aspects of this passage. First, the greeting. Second, the thanksgiving. And then third, the prayer. So first, the greeting in verse 1 and 2.

He begins this letter in a standard way by indicating who it's from and who it's for. Verse 1. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.

So here Paul's describing the most important relationship that a person can have. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And so he describes himself and Timothy as servants of Christ Jesus.

[12 : 35] And he calls the Philippians God's holy people or saints in Christ Jesus. And so those are two descriptions of what it means to be a Christian.

A servant and a saint. The word servant can be translated as slave. So a believer is a slave to Jesus Christ, subject to his authority and to his lordship.

So we're a slave to sin until we are set free by Jesus Christ to then live under his rule. And then this other term that Paul uses here, a saint.

Now he's not addressing a particular group of super spiritual people here. When we were on holiday, we visited a number of different European cities. And as a tourist, one of the best things you can do is go and visit churches because they're free.

They never charge anything for you to go in and look around a church. And I was struck as I looked at different churches just how many relics there were of people they referred to as saints.

[13 : 41] How many statues and pictures of saints everywhere as if these are special people that should be venerated? But Paul calls all believers saints.

All believers are God's holy people. And so the letter is for the whole church. And whilst it's for the whole church, Paul also draws attention to the leaders, calling them the overseers and deacons, the elders and deacons, because they must listen carefully to Paul's words.

They are the ones who need to put into practice the things that Paul teaches in the congregation. But what is most significant in this opening phrase that Paul uses here is this, these two words, in Christ.

In Christ. Do you notice that? There in verse 2, in Christ Jesus. And that's Paul's favorite way of describing what it means to be a Christian.

To be a Christian is to be in Christ. And it's a phrase that comes up 10 times, around 10 times in Philippians. But you read this phrase again and again and again all the way through Paul's letters.

[14 : 58] This short preposition, in, is so expansive in what it expresses. It expresses our union with Jesus Christ.

That's why you'll notice as you read the New Testament that Paul never talks about being a Christian. He describes himself. And he describes fellow believers as men and women in Christ. In Christ Jesus. And so in just a couple of words, as he opens his letter, he is making a monumental statement. And he's giving us the key to understanding our identity and also the blessings of our salvation.

If we are in Christ, it means so much. And that's why he continues there in verse 2. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace express the effect of the saving work of Jesus Christ in our lives. grace. And this greeting, grace and peace, appears in all of Paul's 13 letters.

[16:06] So being in Christ means experiencing God's grace and peace. And the source of this is God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. So what's grace?

Grace is God's favor to people like us who don't deserve it. And it's expressed in the coming of Jesus to die on the cross for our sin.

And peace is what flows from this. So that's the greeting. And then there's the thanksgiving in verse 3 to 8. Paul gives thanks. He says every time he prays for the Philippians.

And this must have been a massive encouragement for the Philippian church that after 10 years of its life, the Apostle Paul continually prays for them.

And notice that his thanksgiving has got this past and present and future elements to it. So first of all, past. In the past, he remembers them.

[17:04] Verse 3, I thank my God every time I remember you. So Paul's got good memories of his time with the Philippians in Philippi. Not good memories in the sense of he was on holiday there and he had some fun times with them.

But it's because of all that God has done in their lives. He remembers them with gratitude for the way that God transformed and changed them.

That's the past. And then there's this present element and it's the partnership that Paul has with them. He continually thanks God in prayer for their partnership in the gospel.

So verse 4 and 5, In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

And it's this partnership that injects joy into Paul's prayers for them. And it's a joy that bursts out all the way through this short letter.

[18:05] And he's filled with joy because the gospel of Jesus Christ has taken root in the hearts of the Philippians. because the Philippians have partnered with Paul in his ministry, in gospel ministry.

This word partnership here means communion or participation or fellowship. And it basically describes sharing a common vision together, working together, partnering together with a specific aim.

And so Paul's saying that the Philippians had been so invested in Paul's ministry that they supported him financially and they supported him practically.

And so verse 14 of chapter 4, they sent Paul a monetary gift. Verse 25 of chapter 2, they sent this man Epaphroditus to care for Paul while he was in prison.

He'd left them but they didn't forget about him. He knew they were supporting him and praying for him. And so even when he's in prison, Paul prays with joy because of this partnership.

[19:16] Now the joy he's talking about here is more than just being happy. Walking around with a big smile on your face, it's this deep sense of gratitude to God for what God has done in their lives.

and what God had done in their lives made a tangible impact on Paul's own life and Paul's work for God. And so can you see how the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ was the priority for this church?

They'd centered their lives and they'd centered their resources around supporting the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ. And it does take that, you know, doesn't it?

We need as a church to partner together in gospel work. We all need to share this common vision for the gospel of Jesus Christ and invest our lives and our resources in it.

And that's just part and parcel of what it means to be in Christ, to be a Christian. We're not to be passengers who simply come along for a free ride.

[20:33] We're to be active participants who get stuck into the work that Jesus is doing in building his church in this world. So what does it look like? Well, it looks the same as it does here through praying, through loving, through giving, through caring, through sharing.

Because without this, we're not really being the church the New Testament calls us to be. So for Paul, there's this past remembrance, there's the present partnership, but then there's also the future completion.

Did you see that in verse 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.

So Paul is confident that God, who started this good work in the lives of the Philippians, will finish it. The good work of salvation that God had begun will be completed.

Paul knows that the Philippians will persevere, and not because of them, but because of God. God will complete his work in the lives of his people.

[21 : 48] And that is a great assurance for every single one of us who professes to be a Christian in Christ. We're by no means the finished article.

I know that in my life. I know that in your lives. We're not there yet. We've not graduated or reached perfection. God has still got work to do in us.

But the good news is, Paul says, he will keep doing that good work in you until the day that Jesus Christ returns. So we are like a building project that has started but is not yet complete.

All across the skyline of Glasgow there are various building projects going on. And one day they'll be finished. And Paul's saying that's what God is doing in you.

He'll finish what he started. And so, whether you would call yourself a new believer or even if you've been one for a while, you're a work in progress. progress. We all are.

[22 : 53] But we're a work that God is going to complete. And so, after Paul gives thanks for the Philippians, he expresses his affection for them. Did you see that in verse 7 and 8?

It 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.

God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. He says, I have you in my heart. I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Now, Paul's a tough guy. I don't expect men to talk in such emotional terms. And it may seem unusual for him to speak like this, but he wants the Philippians to know how he feels about them.

So much so that you notice his words carry the strength of an oath. He says, God can testify or he's saying, God is my witness. He could not state more strongly the affection that he has for these people.

[24 : 08] And so we just read in the previous verses what partnership in the gospel looks like practically. And now we're reading about what partnership in the gospel feels like emotionally.

The gospel of Jesus Christ changes our affections for other people, especially in the church. And so yes, the gospel of Jesus Christ is about what we believe and it's about what we think and understand, but it also transforms how we feel towards other people.

It can't help but make a practical impact on all of our relationships. And so the fruit of the gospel in your heart and in my heart will be a genuine affection for one another.

And so well, how can we foster this in the relationships with each other? Well, let me just flip it around to suggest what can hinder this warmth of relationship that's described here in Philippians chapter 1.

What can hinder it is a failure to actually know the people who go to the same church or belong to the same church as you do. So the people who sit in the seats next to you, if we don't really know them, we'll never have this warmth of relationship.

[25 : 32] If we're merely acquaintances, it's going to go nowhere. We need to be brothers and sisters, part of the family of Christ. It is also a failure to be committed to worship on Sundays, to be committed to corporate prayer, to be committed to real community.

Because if we behave like a consumer instead of a contributor of the ministry, then we'll fail to have this warmth of affection in the relationships that we read about here in Philippians.

And it's also a failure to invest in God's work because if we only grudgingly give of our time and our talents and our treasures rather than generously, then we'll fail to have this warmth of affection for God's people in His church.

Because what brings us together, what keeps us together, and what enables others to be welcomed into our fellowship, our partnership together, is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And that's what Paul wants to impress upon the Philippians. So we're heading towards this, but see what he says in verse 27 of chapter 1. He says, Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

[26 : 56] Then whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.

This is why Paul puts the priorities of the gospel at the center of his prayer for the Philippians, which we see in verse 9 to 11. Just listen to what Paul prays for them.

And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

His prayer for them, you notice, is centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ and it helps us to know what we should be praying for one another. Paul prays that the Philippians' love may abound more and more.

Now he doesn't specify the object of their love but it's got to be love for God and love for God's people and surely love for those who aren't God's people. That's why the teaching of God's word and the gospel message that he has in view here is meant to produce love in us, through us, amongst us.

[28 : 27] So knowing Jesus and being in Christ should make our love abound more and more. And so the challenge is, is that happening in your life?

Is that happening in my life? Is my love abounding more and more? the further down the road I go as a follower of Jesus because it should be, surely, shouldn't it?

Am I a more loving person today than I was a year ago? But Paul's specific about the kind of love he's talking about.

He's not talking about some kind of sentimental, slushy, touchy-feely kind of love where you just go around and hug everyone and anyone. Feel free to do that if you like, but it's not everybody's cup of tea, but that's not what he's talking about here.

He says, well notice, he says, he prays for love which abounds in knowledge and depth of insight. So it's not a love that is merely emotional, but it's a love that is knowledgeable and becomes more knowledgeable of God and his ways, giving a depth of insight so that we know how to live.

[29 : 46] It's practical. Paul's praying that the Philippians would grow and mature because he's praying with a further goal in view. He prays so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

So his prayer is that their love won't result in some kind of half-baked, mediocre, insipid kind of Christianity, but that this love would produce abundant fruit so that they're filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

In other words, he wants them to live lives in Christ that give praise and glory to God in every way until Jesus Christ returns.

because we are moving closer to that day. The day of Christ is the day when Jesus will come again and he'll come in power and glory and that's why Paul is saying we can't settle as we are.

We've got to grow and move forward and keep working out what God is working in us which he'll bring to completion.

[31 : 04] And so how can we live like this? Well, in Christ of course. Just notice how many times Paul mentions Jesus as he opens his letter to the Philippians.

In these 11 verses he speaks of Jesus seven times because life is all about Jesus. Your life, our church life together.

And the reason is Jesus alone brings true and lasting joy to our lives and to our relationships.

Because when we know who we are in him and we understand our identity then we'll know true joy.

Because it's only through the abounding love of Jesus Christ for us displayed at the cross where Jesus died for our sins. it's only through that love that we can discover this true joy.

And so when we're in Christ and when we're living for Christ our love should be abounding more and more for him but also through him for one another.

[32 : 19] And so may that be true of our church family and all of our relationships here. Let's pray. Amen. Amen.