

Partners in Grace

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[0 : 0 0] We are starting a new series, and so if you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn into the book of Philippians chapter 1. And if you don't have a Bible with you, we're going to have the verses up on the screen as well.

And so this book of Philippians, it's fascinating, it's beautiful, it's wonderful. If you ever read the letter of Philippians, you know it's just, it comes across as very joyful, but also challenging in really good ways as well.

And so we've called this series Partners in Grace, and that's taken from verse 7 of chapter 1 where Paul says to the Philippian church, you are partakers with me of the same grace.

And so throughout this series, we're going to explore what that means. Like Paul opens his letter with that, we're going to explore what that means and the implications for life together in Christ and what that looks like.

So I want to say this from the outset. Our culture, and I think what I love about Philippians and really what it is going to speak into, especially today, is that it's going to speak into what our culture has become and what our culture celebrates.

[1 : 0 6] And it's this idea of rugged individualism. And here's the thing, like any culture that we live in, and wherever the gospel is being proclaimed, there is going to be cultural idols and norms that are going to be, we're going to be tempted to synchronize like a bit of those things with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So it'll be a little bit of gospel or a lot of gospel, but like some of this like American culture, rugged individualism kind of mixed in. And so I think that's what's happened to us in the church quite a bit.

We've married that value to the gospel. But what we're going to read as we go through this book of Philippians is that, man, the gospel actually makes no room for this.

Like we say lone rangers are dead rangers, but the gospel really makes no room for any kind of lone rangers. It's the life in Christ is as much a we thing as it is a me thing.

Now, both is true. I'm not going to say like the you, the individual doesn't matter. Like you definitely matter to Jesus, but you are caught up into a bigger story. You're caught up into the people of God and what he is doing with his church together.

[2 : 1 6] And in the evangelical context in America, I think we live out our lives in Christ. We live out the gospel in a certain way that looks kind of more like this, like big me, little we.

But here's how Jesus lived. Here's the gospel he proclaimed, very different to that. And that we also see his apostles, how they lived and proclaimed it as well. And it looks more like this, big we, little me.

And here's the thing, grace doesn't make you the center of God's universe, which has nothing to do with the quality and measure of the father's love for you.

That's not what we're getting at here. But God's grace brings us into a new reality of divine love. And it's a love that is relational. It is sacrificial. And it's many other things as we're going to see throughout this series.

And it changes the way that we live. It is counter cultural. It is prophetic. It speaks prophetically against our culture and calls things as they are. It exposes them and reveals them.

[3 : 17] And it calls us to something better. And that's for all of us. We all get to be partakers or partners of the same grace. So let's dive into Philippians chapter one.

It says this. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank God. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

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. 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, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

[4 : 40] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. This is God's word to us.

Now, let me just say this. That is a way to open a letter. Am I right? I mean, if I was to like harness some of what Paul was able to harness there, like that joy and affection and I was to like write a Haley, a Valentine's Day card, let me just say, put the kids down early because we're going to be playing some Scrabble, right?

Is Paul being hyperbolic here? Is Paul just like, is this just window dressing? It's just like, oh, you know, Paul, he likes to overstate things a little bit.

He always takes things a little too far. How can you and I know that he is really being sincere? Well, let's consider what we do know about Paul and his connection to the Philippians. So the historians say that this letter that he wrote was about 10 years into the church being planted in Philippi.

And Paul is the one who did that, which again, if you think about it, 10 years in, right? That's enough time for anybody's love to grow cold. And not to be cynical, but a lot of marriages never make it that long before the thrill is gone and people are hitting the eject button, right?

[6 : 05] But here we have Paul head over heels in love with this church. That's what we are seeing on these pages, even in those first 11 verses.

Now, what I mean head over heels in love is that I mean that in the purest, godly way that a pastor or a person should have as far as love goes towards the church that they are connected to.

Now, think about, again, the history that Paul has with these guys. 10 years prior, they arrive on the scene in Philippi, preaching the gospel of Jesus. And it says one of the first encounters, early encounters they have is with this rich businesswoman named Lydia.

And she converted and believed. And she says she compelled them to stay at their house. And they said, I don't know. And she's like, I'm not taking no for an answer. And praise God for confident, capable woman in the kingdom of God, right?

And then the next story in Philippi is they cast a demonic spirit out of a slave girl that was giving her divination powers. And her masters, her slave owners, were getting rich off of that.

[7 : 07] And those guys didn't like it because now, like, a big income source for them is lost. And so they stirred things up against Paul and Silas. And there was a bit of a riot. And Paul and Silas got thrown in jail in kind of the local dungeon.

And that's where that famous story where they're in the dungeon and in the stocks, but they're worshiping God despite all those things. And then God comes and shakes the prison. And the stocks get loose.

The chains fall off of them. The prison doors open. But Paul and Silas don't run out screaming freedom a la William Wallace in the moment. They stay put. Why? Because they're thinking of the jailer's life and salvation and well-being.

And they're thinking like, hey, that's actually more important than their own. It's an interesting start for Paul and the Philippian church. But here's the thing.

How it started is how it continued. Ten years later, the thrill for Paul, the love for them is still alive and well. And the question for us today is what makes for that kind of lasting, meaningful partnership?

[8 : 10] What makes for that kind of loving, joyous affection that can sustain and maintain that long? And I would argue maybe even increase over time. Well, there's lots of good practices that help, and we'll get to those.

But that isn't where we should start because that's not where God starts. It's not even where Paul starts. He opens this letter, and he says to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers or the elders or the pastors and the deacons, the leadership team.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. See, Paul isn't thinking about big me. He is thinking about big we in this opening.

He's thinking about the church. He is thinking about the us, the togetherness. And here's the thing. God's grace will do that to you and me. God's grace makes you others-oriented. Now, here's the unspoken part about that.

Being others-oriented is totally backwards to how we naturally think and act, right? Me and my wife, Haley, we have this little saying, and, you know, it's kind of—it doesn't really—hopefully, it doesn't reflect on my true character, but it's kind of funny.

[9 : 19] It's like, you know, Jesse's always looking out for number one. And I try not to do that, but it's like, we'll say that from time to time as a ha-ha-ha. But being others-oriented, thinking about others first and primarily about them, it is totally backward to how we think or act.

And here's why. Doing that makes you the smaller person. I love Tolkien's Lord of the Rings because, like, the more I read it, and I've read it, like, through a few times now, man, I just discovered, like, there's just some subtleties in there that he wrote in that story that are just profound theological truths.

And in his book, the heroes were the shire folk, the hobbits, the small people. They were the only ones fit to destroy the ring of power because they were not inclined to take power for themselves or to dominate or to rule over others.

And, you know, what's funny is their cultural realities that Tolkien weaves into the story are built around the big we, the capital we, more than the big me.

So the epic, Tolkien opens his epic with Bilbo's birthday. But for hobbits, the birthday begins with you giving everyone else gifts. Backwards, right?

[10 : 37] And you make a speech honoring and thanking and blessing others instead of the other way around. It's backwards. It's brilliant. The small people did the things that made them smaller and others bigger.

And that ethic is precisely why it made them fit for the greatest of deeds. Now, that's a fiction story. How about in the real world, Jesse? Well, that's why you and I need grace because it calls us, that's like the ethic I just talked about is like the ethic of the kingdom of God.

Right? Grace, we need this grace to pull this off. We need this grace to be able to even want to do this. Grace. And this grace that I'm talking about, it includes salvation in Jesus Christ and being saved and set free from sin.

But there's another reality of grace in that God extends himself to his people, which if you've been around, you hear me say that a lot. But it's a good picture for us, right? Because that imagery in our mind helps us connect the dots that God's grace also means that he is infusing you and me with his very nature.

He is pouring himself. He is extending himself into each one of us all the time. And here's why we need that. Because left to our own devices, we are going to stay like big me, little wee people.

[11 : 56] But having become partakers, having become sharers, having become participants of God's grace together, we are now like we are now big wee, little wee people.

And that changes some motivations and proclivities in our heart. And one of them is that sharing in God's grace together. What it does, it draws us together. And what does that mean?

That means faithful presence. Not like you got to be with everybody all the time, 24-7. Paul isn't talking about having church service. Like if you do this, you got to have church service every day of the week and you better show up to every single one of them.

It's just that this, this is what it means. There is this new longing to be with other believers. There is this new longing to be with other Christians.

Philippians 1.8, Paul says it this way. God is my witness. God is my witness. How I yearn, yearn for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

[12 : 57] Like Paul's got that yearn grace on him, you know? And I say we need some more of that in the American context. That yearn, that is a strong word.

And to be honest, it makes me a little bit uncomfortable. Like, man, is that turning me into like an unhealthy codependent person? Or it kind of sounds more appropriate like a word you would use to describe two lovers and forced separation for a long time.

And let me just say by lovers, I mean a husband and a wife. Like saving myself from unnecessary email work this week. Yearn, just like you hear that from Paul and you're just like, man, sounds a little over the top.

Like yearn for each other? But here's the thing. If Paul thinks about the Philippian church this way, then it stands to reason that God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ thinks about us this way.

And I kind of like the thought that God might yearn for me. That doesn't weird me out. Because yearning drives people into action.

[14 : 03] It drove God to send Jesus to save us and to bring us to himself. A divine yearning led to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It led to him going all the way and living and dying in our place for us.

And it still does. A divine yearning led to the incarnation. And it does still, but I'm talking about you and me now. Incarnation simply means showing up in person.

But what are the implications of that for us? What is the reasonable response to this yearn grace that God means us to have?

Well, again, it can't mean that we're just with each other 24-7, right? Because omnipresence isn't an option. Although I am wondering about that with Ryan and Caroline Darden.

Just because every time I go to a restaurant in New Bern, they happen to be there. I don't know what's going on. So if that's happening to anybody else, like we can start some conspiracy theory here, right?

[15 : 07] Like, I don't know. I don't know. Paul yearned. Because part of it is he loved them so much.

But the other reality is his life as it was, wasn't allowing him to be present with them. And he wanted that. He actually wanted to be present with them.

Yearning is a great indicator that God's grace is at work in our hearts. But at the same time, I'll say this. We do have to live in the real and not the ideal of that.

Paul's life, if you look at it, his calling, he was, it was a little more transient. As an apostle, that was his calling. He was going to a lot of different places and bringing the gospel to a lot of different places.

And then moving on once something was established there. But at the same time, Paul wasn't a lone ranger. He had Timothy and Titus and Epaphroditus.

[16 : 04] And these were his folks. This was his like squad, his people that he did life with that were with him a lot most of the time.

Those were the guys he could be regularly present with. Paul did life in team, small team, a couple of folks. So my question to us is who is our regular one or two or three?

Who are those people? And here's a little hint. It can't be your favorite podcaster. That doesn't count. It can't be Beth Moore and her Bible study. That doesn't count. Who is your one or two?

And that's one way our lives should manifest that like yearn grace that God has for us. That's big we, little me living. But that doesn't mean we ignore the broader church family.

It's not like I'm just going to stay small and, you know, tough luck everybody else. No, that's why Sundays are important and community groups are important. And those are really important discipleship contexts.

[17 : 02] We need those things. That's also how we live out that year in grace. And it's also how we cultivate and keep that ongoing thing of being partners in grace with one another.

But there are ways. There are other ways to cultivate and keep that partnership of grace when we aren't together. And Paul shows us how.

Philippians 1, 3 to 4, it says this. I thank God in all my remembrance of you. Always in every prayer of mine.

For you all making my prayer with joy. And this is like partners in grace 101. This is something we have to get down as a church, as the people of God.

Grace partners pray for each other. Not only when we're together. Which we should. But also when we're not together. Here's a little like confession time for myself.

[17 : 59] And I might get myself in a little bit of hot water here. But I'm going to say it anyways. I just noticed that, one, I'm really terrible at remembering names. So if I get your name wrong. Or confuse it with something else.

Or I say, hey bro. Or good to see you. It's probably because I'm like my. I got like a 486 processor in my head. You know? And like I'm just like.

What is the name's not coming up. I'm just waiting. Just my thing, man. You know? But I notice here. I do notice this. When I pray more regularly for people.

Their names are on better recall. Like not perfect. But a little better. Right? And I realize that like. Okay. I might have put myself in hot water. Now if I don't remember your name.

You might be walking away thinking like. I guess I know who isn't praying for me. Right? Now that may or may not be true. Take heart that I pray for my kids all the time.

[18 : 58] And I still get their names wrong. So there's that. All right? There's that. The point is this. Like when we regularly pray for people. It keeps them in front of us.

But it also cultivates our bonds of love for them. And I'm not saying this is like. The silver bullet that's going to solve all our problems. Right? If we're like having issues in whatever relationship we have.

Like man. Prayer is an important thing. But it's not the silver bullet. But man. Give it a chance. Right? Use it. Because I think. Man. Prayer is such an integral part of having a healthy relationship.

Right? I would say like. If you want your relationships to thrive. Whether that is friendships or your marriage. Like step one. Pray for them. Step two.

Pray for them. Step three. Pray for them. Step four. Well I was going to say. Live more we versus me. But you get. Okay. Good job.

[19 : 56] I'm just like. Praying is. It's just a good thing for me and you to engage in. Praying for one another is such an important part of our lives together in Jesus Christ.

But as good as prayer is. Let me. Let me just qualify this a little bit more. In that. Our prayers for each other. Should be more ordered toward the gospel of big.

Big we and little me. Which. But what I say by this is. What I mean by that is like. When you pray. Pray that God would supply others with his best blessings. Now.

All the gospel purists out there are getting a little fidgety. And they're like. Jesse where are you heading with this? Are we getting into prosperity gospel stuff here? Not at all. I'm going to read a passage of scripture.

From. The text we just read. And I want you to play. Pay close attention. To what Paul says. He prays for these Philippian Christians. Verses 9 to 11.

[20 : 56] Paul says. It is my prayer. So now we know what Paul's going to be praying for them. That your love. Philippian believers. May abound more and more. With knowledge and all discernment.

So that you may approve what is excellent. And so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Christ. Filled with the fruit of righteousness. That comes through Jesus Christ. Through the glory and praise of God.

And all the time. Paul is saying. I'm praying for you guys all the time. And. I'm remembering you all the time. In my prayers. And this is what he is saying.

This is the stuff. He is praying for them. And wanting for them. He doesn't mention their health. Or their wealth. Or their prosperity. Or even their safety. It's all about their lives.

Displaying the fruits of righteousness. That comes through a maturing knowledge. And a maturing discernment. And a deeper experience of God's love. Which in turn. Ends up giving praise and glory to God.

[21 : 56] And the breath. I would say this. The best prayers we can pray for each other. Is for more knowledge. And more understanding. And a greater reality of God's love.

That is what. That is praying God's best for each other. Now I want to say this. I can't prove what I'm about to say right now. But I wonder. Just because of looking at Paul's prayer life.

And looking at Paul's prayers. And the way he prayed for the church and believers. Could it be. That a church with a majority. Who prays this way for each other. Will have a sweeter togetherness.

Than if they didn't. And would it also mean. That there would probably be less division. And less conflict. In the church. But here's the thing.

It would take more than the pastors doing this. It's you and me. Partakers of the same grace. Partners in the same grace. Us doing this together. All of us.

[22 : 53] Praying these kind of prayers. The big we little me prayers. And if Paul's witness is true. Then so is this final point. Sharing in God's grace together.

Fills you with joy. Joy. I've been reading books on brain science. Because why not. Right. And what is fascinating about this. Is what's been discovered.

In that field. Over the last four decades of research. Is theologically confirming. Of what the Bible says about us. And how God's made us. And how we thrive in life. It says this.

Joy is the jet fuel for healthy brain function. This is like brain science research. And joy. They go on to say. It's like how do you get joy. Joy is experienced.

And grows. Through what is described. As loving relational attachments. In your life. Isn't that fascinating. Science is saying.

[23 : 48] What the Bible has been saying. You need we. To cultivate joy. You can't do it on your own. And here's some good news. When we are apart.

Even in those moments. Like there. Again brain science here. Is when we don't have that. There's another way. To cultivate joy. Even though you may not be around. The people that are. Loving.

You can be lovingly attached to. Those good safe. Wonderful people. That can cultivate that joy. And it's. This is how you can cultivate it. Even in. Some solitude moments. You remember.

Good and beautiful things. You remember those moments. In your life. Where people have meant something. Significant to you. Maybe they said a word of blessing over you. Maybe they. They did something that was so kind.

And loving. That like just. Affected you in profound ways. It's. It's going back to those moments. Where we can re-experience. Kindness. Or give thanks. For something done generously.

[24 : 43] Toward us. Loving connected relationships. Are necessary for joy. And so is remembering them. In prayer. Now. When Paul writes this.

I don't want us to lose the context here. He's writing this letter from prison. Right. Which. Is not a great place to be. It's not like. I don't think that's like the top like five.

Things. We would want for our circumstance in life. Right. And yet. As bad as that is. He's got so much joy. Again.

Because of what he did. It's who he is. What he does. I thank my God. In all my remembrance of you. Always. In every prayer of mine.

For you all. Making my prayer with joy. Because of your partnership. In the gospel. From the first day. Until now. Paul. Is like. What is he doing? He is remembering.

[25 : 43] He is like. Man. You guys. Are so special to me. You guys. I love you so much. And I am remembering that. I am remembering those precious moments. All the time.

And then he goes on to say this. I am sure of this. That he who began a good work in you. Will bring it to completion. At the day of Christ. So let's be diligent. To pray for each other.

To pray God's best blessings. Over each other. To pray in a way that cultivates our joy. And gratitude. And strengthens our relational bonds of love. But let's do that.

Knowing that these things are effective. Because Christ is sufficient. Our partnership in grace. Is held firm in Christ. Not in how much we pray or don't pray.

He who began a good work in you. Will bring it to completion. At the day of Jesus. That's what Paul like. Paul is so confident in that. He's like. Man. That is the best news of the day. And here's the thing friends.

[26 : 42] We don't toil in prayer. At a fear that people's salvation. Is up to our prayer efforts. We toil in prayer. Because we know. That we are joining with Jesus. In his sovereign purpose.

And redemptive work. In those prayers. He is our great high priest in heaven. He was ever interceding for us. We're joining him in that work. We're participating with him. In that work. Partakers of that same grace.

And we pray like Paul did. We are reminded of how Jesus. Is working out his salvation. In all of his disciples. It reminds us that regardless. Of our present circumstance.

Regardless of the lack of fruitfulness. We may see. Regardless of the suffering. Or sorrow. We may be enduring. Regardless of the strain. We feel between us.

And others in our lives. We pray with that day. That day of our Lord Jesus Christ. In mind. More than anything else. He who began a good work. In you will.

[27 : 36] Bring it to completion. I have that promise in Christ. You have that promise in Christ. Christ. We have that promise in Christ. And in Christ.

We get to do it together. Can you say that today? As the band comes up. And we look to respond. In a moment. We're going to take communion. But if you're not yet a follower of Jesus.

I want to say to you. Before you come to the table. You have to come to Jesus. And you have to accept him. As your Lord and Savior. That is step one. That is going to transform your life.

Make you a whole new person. And that's where you need to start. You have to become a partaker of that grace. From the very beginning. And there's going to be a prayer for you on the screen.

It's going to lead you. It's a way to lead you into a prayer of like repentance and faith. And if that's how God is stirring you. And that's how you're being stirred in this moment. I encourage you. Pray that prayer.

[28 : 35] And you will be saved. And afterwards man. I would love for you to come talk to me. Or Elliot. One of the past. You know. Any one of us. And just share that with us. We would love to know that.

So we can rally around you. Because this way of following Jesus. It's a. It's not a you thing. Alone with him. It's a us together thing. Now if you're already a follower of Jesus. How is God calling to respond today?

What are some things you can do? Changes you can make in your life. Communion is this beautiful reminder. That we are called by Christ. Into this wonderful relationship with him.

And union with him. But you know what? It's also union and fellowship. And participation. With his people. We are all coming to the same table.

We are all coming to the same body. His body broken for us. He calls us around that same body. He calls us around that same cup. It's a beautiful thing. That we get to participate in.

[29 : 32] And so. Before you go and take communion today. I'm going to pray for this moment. And then when you're ready. You can go to the table. And bring the bread and the cup. Back to your seat. And I just want to say this.

This may be a good day. Not to take it by yourself. Maybe go to somebody you know. And just. Break bread with them. Pray over that time.

Encourage one another. And take communion. communion with someone. So Father. We come to you today. We thank you that you are faithful.

You are good. You are righteous. You are holy. You are all the things. That we need to be. But can never be. And yet. What you have done. Is you have sent your son. Jesus Christ. You sent him to live the life.

We couldn't live. To pay the penalty. For our failure. To live that life. You took away the penalty of sin. You took away the power of sin. And then Lord.

[30 : 31] You. You gave us this beautiful calling. Into your presence. To be united with Christ. To be united with his people.

Lord. It's life together in you. As we follow you. And we make much of you. Loving you. And loving others. And help us to do that Lord. With great joy. We pray this in your name.

[illegible]