

Philippians 1:1-11 – Bible study

Opening question. What is something about your Bible study group that you love?

Background: Read Acts 16:6-40

1. What opposition had Paul faced in Philippi when he started the church?

2. How do we see God at work to establish his church?

Read Philippians 1:1-8

3. How does Paul feel about the Philippian Christians?

4. Paul is confident that God will complete his work in them (verse 6). Why do you think he is confident?

5. In what are Paul and the Philippians partners? What do they share in common? (Also read 4:10-19.)

6. What clues do we get about how the Philippians have expressed their partnership with Paul?

7. The word ‘partnership’ (*koinonia*) and ‘share’ (v.7 NIV) could also be translated as ‘fellowship’.

a. How is the word ‘fellowship’ often used by Christians?

b. What do these verses show us about the true source of our Christian fellowship?

8. What good experiences do you have of Gospel partnership?

9. Paul was far away in Rome, yet the Philippians were still partners with him. If your Bible study group has a link missionary, how could you partner with them in the Gospel?

Read Phil 1:9-11

10. Follow the logic of Paul’s prayer

a. What should characterize their love?

b. What are the two *results* Paul seeks from this kind of love (look for the ‘so that’)

c. What is the time frame Paul has in mind?

d. What is the ultimate desire for the Philippians?

e. What is Paul’s ultimate desire overall?

f. *How* will all this come?

11. Paul wants them to have love and knowledge together. You’re your experience, and from Scripture, what happens if we have love without knowledge? Or knowledge without love?

12. What do you think are the ‘best’ things Paul is looking for? (It isn’t explicit in these verses, but we have clues from the priorities Paul has shown so far in the letter).

13. What difference would it make in your life if God gave you more of the things Paul prays for here?

Finish with prayer, using Paul’s prayer in your own prayers.

Notes for leaders

From the Matthias series. Some words about 'fellowship' and 'partnership'.

'Fellowship' is a word Christians throw around with happy abandon. We have 'fellowship' after the service, where food and drinks are served in a comfortable atmosphere, and we report that "the fellowship was great" (even if the rest was lousy). We rightly think fellowship has something to do with warm relationships with others. Yet we are often disappointed with what passes for fellowship in the normal course of events.

Paul's letter to the Philippians teaches a lot about genuine Christian fellowship. Fellowship is something we can have even when we aren't in each other's company, although it usually makes us long for that company (see 1:8). It is the relationship created by having a stake in a common property or enterprise. And Christians have some very significant common property—we are "partakers/sharers" in God's grace (Phil 1:7). We each benefit enormously from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in forgiveness and hope and in the new life of God's Spirit. Despite differences in race, gender and economic affluence (and hair style), what we share in common is far more significant than these differences. (The disappointing thing is that we so rarely experience the fellowship Christ has created. It is easier and more comfortable to experience "weather fellowship" or "football fellowship" than Christian fellowship.)

And we can be partners in the cause of the gospel, as we work together to see the lost won to Christ and the won strengthened in faith, hope and love. Our roles may vary greatly... But our common purpose creates a rich and energetic fellowship. In fact, for many of us the richest experiences of fellowship have been as part of a team working intensely in the cause of the gospel—on a beach mission, or a camp, or at a church outreach event.

The paradoxical thing about fellowship is that if we focus on *trying* to have fellowship, it usually falls flat. Fellowship is a by-product of focusing on the thing we hold in common. And what a terrific by-product it is!

A note on verse 6 (question 4)

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.

What gives Paul confidence that God will complete his work? God gives him the confidence! What God begins, he will complete.

This could lead into questions about whether someone is 'once saved, always saved.' One problem with such discussions is a misunderstanding of who is 'saved'. The saved person is the one who perseveres to the end. Like the parable of the sower, some seeds fall on shallow soil – it looks good for a while but then withers. The good soil perseveres and bears a crop at harvest time (Luke 8:15). Paul could also see signs in the Philippians' lives that showed they were persevering. Their faith was bearing fruit in good works, showing that it was not dead (James 2).

Philippians 2:12-13 might also help if such a discussion arises. It shows that we cannot relax with a 'once saved always saved attitude'. We are to 'work out our salvation'. Yet we need not be anxious about whether we will make it, because 'God is at work'.