

Relationships About Jesus (Philippians 1:1-11)

Paul and the Philippian church introduce relationships about Jesus...

Let's ask for God's help as we start a new series on the book of Philippians....

So Philippians is written by an early church leader named Paul to the church in Philippi. In last Sunday's message, we saw when Paul came to Philippi and courageously sacrificed to plant the Philippian church. By God's grace, a diverse group of people were set free in Jesus.

And for the next decade, Paul and the Philippian church enjoy a great relationship, continuing to connect and pray for each other. And though the Philippian church is poor, they plead for the privilege to give to the Jerusalem church when it hits hard times and they generously support Paul's church planting work in other cities. Paul typically wouldn't personally accept money from the churches he planted, but with the Philippians it was different, a special relationship.

But now Paul is in prison again for sharing Jesus. In Roman prison there's no cafeteria, so if someone from the outside doesn't bring you food, you go hungry. So the Philippians send Epaphroditus to Paul with food, supplies, and encouragement. And while there, Epaphroditus tells Paul that the church is starting to struggle. There's persecution and false teaching, and these stresses from the outside are leading to difficult relationships inside the church.

So Epaphroditus probably asks Paul questions like: Paul, how do we live out the good news of Jesus when life is filled with bad news? And what do we do about false teachers promising us better lives if we follow them instead of Jesus? And people are hostile toward our church, what do we do when attacked? And what do we do about our stressed, dividing relationships?

Relevance: we need relationships about Jesus to live well and make it through hard times

Epaphroditus has come to the right place. Paul has faced all these issues before and currently as he is chained to a Roman guard not knowing if he'll be executed soon for his faith.

So Paul writes the Philippians a letter to encourage them that in all of life, including its struggles, it's all about Jesus. It's a message still extremely relevant to our lives today. So I'm thankful we're going through Philippians together, and encourage you to read Philippians every

week of this sermon series. And if reading isn't your thing, listen to Philippians on your phone with the YouVersion Bible app.

Please don't let all your reading during the week be about the bad news in our world, read Philippians as well. It's only four pages in my Bible, but has much encouragement, perspective, and equipping for our challenges and for living powerful lives.

And so if you've got a Bible or Bible app with you now, go ahead and open to Philippians, chapter 1. If not, no worries, we'll have the verses on the screen. And if you're new to the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers.

To start, Paul encourages the Philippians to keep making their relationships about Jesus. For the Philippians, and for us, we're going to need relationships about Jesus to endure in hard times and to experience God's best.

But good church relationships are not guaranteed. If you've been in church for some time, I bet you've experienced some pain and struggle, like the Philippians do at the time of Paul's letter. But when churches make their relationships about Jesus, there is great potential to be blessed and a blessing to others and to make it out of a hard time spiritually stronger.

So Paul starts by reminding the Philippians of the great job they've previously done having relationships about Jesus, and encourages them to keep growing. So let's see what relationships about Jesus look like, and be encouraged, like the Philippians, to take hold of their full potential.

We'll start with the greeting in verse 1 of chapter 1. **(1-2)**

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: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here Paul, and his co-laborer Timothy, greet the Philippian church. And as verse 2 shows, this greeting is not only from them, but also from God, which is kind of mind blowing when you think about it. So in the church even our greetings to each other are important since they're about Jesus. And as we move into the letter's introduction, we see three things that relationships about Jesus share.

Teaching: Relationships about Jesus have shared...

Mission (3-6) – The first is shared mission, starting in verse 3.

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

In verses 3 and 4, Paul shares how he thanks God for the Philippians every time he remembers them and prays for them. In verse 5 Paul begins to describe why. It's because of their partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

About 10 years earlier, Paul came to Philippi to share the gospel, the good news that Jesus came to rescue us from the brokenness of our world, lives, and relationships. Jesus inaugurating a new kingdom by dying for our sins and rising from the dead.

And if you don't yet identify as a follower of Jesus, so thankful you're here. There's plenty of room in God's kingdom. Trust that Jesus lived a perfect life in your place, on your behalf, and then died for your sins on the cross and rose from the dead so that you could join in His kingdom of love.

And as we saw last Sunday, people in Philippi joined Paul in putting their faith in Lord Jesus. And now they're partnering with Paul in the gospel. These Philippians and Paul sharing the mission to work for Jesus' kingdom until Jesus returns to bring its fullness.

The Philippians loving their neighbors and inviting them to join Jesus' kingdom of love. And the Philippians also partnering with Paul through prayer, encouragement, and finances to help people all over the Roman empire to become part of Jesus' kingdom of love. The advancement of the gospel is a theme that carries throughout Philippians chapter 1, in these verses, and in Paul's circumstances in verses 12-18, through Paul's future deliverance in verses 19-26, and in the Philippians conduct in verses 27-30.

And this advancing of the gospel isn't just a shared mission between Paul and the Philippians, it's a partnership between Jesus, Paul, and the Philippians. Because Jesus is at work, Paul is confident that the spreading of the good news of Jesus will continue, saying so in verse 6:

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 not only do Paul and the Philippians enjoy a rich relationship around their incredible shared mission, but because of Jesus' work, even as opposition comes, and even as they fail along the way, Jesus will continue to work. Jesus advancing His kingdom until the day of Christ Jesus, when He returns. Our shared mission's ultimate success assured because of His faithfulness, not ours.

Examples of shared mission at Northwest – Thank God for that, and for the privilege we have at Northwest to share together in Jesus’ mission! Globally through partnerships that our Missions Committee and church support with prayer, encouragement, and finances.

Through our little church here in San Antonio, God allows us to share in the Lere’s ministry training Christian leaders around the world in interpersonal skills. And we share in the Miller’s work helping young people in Sweden to join Jesus’ kingdom and grow as His disciples. And we share in the Sneesby’s work getting God’s Word translated into new languages.

And we share in the work of a ministry planting new churches in India. And we share in the Miller’s work starting an Arabic language church among refugees in Madrid, Spain. And, we share in Chollar’s work with Crossway, who have seen many thousands come to Christ during our partnership. And there’s a building for a Crossway orphanage in Sagana, Kenya that would not exist if not for our church. And we share in the Voice of the Martyrs’ ministry helping persecuted Christians with assistance and with resources to keep bravely sharing the love of Jesus.

Jesus letting us share in His mission on a global scale, all from here in San Antonio, to His praise. And we get to share in Jesus’ mission locally too. Helping local high school and college students to take next steps with Jesus with the Jacobson’s through Youth for Christ and with the Gerards and Muckleroy through Destino.

And here at Northwest, in both English and Spanish, helping people to join Jesus’ kingdom and grow as His disciples in worship services, and in ministry to children, youth, and young adults; through adult small groups, and Men’s and Women’s ministries, and counseling; through outreaches like our food pantry, benevolence giving, recent donations to the Salvation Army Shelter, Bible study at the memory care center across the street, and English as a Second Language and citizenship classes. And keeping ministry going in administrative and financial and web based roles and as Deacons and Elders.

And through our recent Kingdom Investments initiative, we have set aside funding and small teams in our church family are planning ways to share the love of Jesus with the Bristol apartments behind our building; with ministry to children and helping adults learn biblical financial principles. And just this week, we’re now providing prayer support and finances to purchase Bibles for Bible school students and food for orphans in Malawi.

In the words of our friend Pastor Roderick Barnes, that's coming together for a lot of "Jesus- centered shenanigans." 😊 And in all of it, Jesus be praised.

Affection (7-8) – Now not everyone wants Jesus' kingdom of love extended. There is opposition. And for Paul, his labor for Jesus' kingdom has not only included great blessings, but great costs, like his current imprisonment.

So imagine the blessing it was for Paul the day Ephaphroditus shows up to the jail, sharing food, supplies, prayers, and encouragement from the Philippians. So I've seen and personally experienced so many of us helping each other, whether that's bringing meals or financial assistance or prayers or visits or encouraging words in our times of need.

And so relationships about Jesus are not only about our vital shared mission, but also about shared affection. Paul describes his deep affection for the Philippians in verse 7. **(7-8)**

⁷ 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. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Paul and the Philippians have shared Jesus' mission together. As verse 7 describes it, the Philippians supporting Paul when in prison and when out sharing the gospel. And through their shared prayer, encouragement, and finances, Paul's affection for the Philippians has grown deep.

People tend to think of Paul as a fiery, determined church planter, but here we see his tender side. In verse 7 he says to the Philippians, "I have you in my heart." as he reflects on what they share in Jesus and how they have mutually encouraged and supported each other.

And Paul says in verse 8 that he longs for all of the Philippians. He so desires the day when they can be face to face again. And Paul doesn't just kinda long for them, or just long for the coolest ones among them, in verse 8 he longs for all of them with the very affection of Christ Jesus. So here we see the potential for relationships about Jesus to include deep affection, the love and support we all long for, in Christ Jesus.

And those kinds of affectionate relationships require consistency and commitment, and so I'm so thankful for how our church family gets that relationships about Jesus consistently share together in His mission and His affection, and in one more thing: prayer.

Prayer (9-11) – Paul, having shared his affection of Jesus for the Philippians, now prays for Jesus to help the Philippians to abound in love as well. Verse 9: **(9-11)**

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

These verses show that relationships about Jesus have shared prayer. Paul is contending for the Philippians' spiritual growth here in prayer, asking God to give them love that abounds. This love is a discerning love, with knowledge and depth of insight, as verse 9 says. And verse 10 shows why Paul prays this prayer. It is so the Philippians can discern what is best and be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

And in verse 11 Paul shares how the Philippians can be empowered with this discerning love that helps them to know and do what is right. It is as they are filled with righteousness that comes through Jesus. So this discerning love requires Jesus working through the Philippians.

And so Paul asks in prayer for Jesus to bring about what only He can. And Paul isn't praying for the Philippians here only because he's stuck in jail and can't go minister to them in person, but because Paul knows relationships about Jesus require Jesus' work to happen.

This week I read an article about a British missionary named James Fraser, whose story is told in the biography *Mountain Rain*. In the early 1900s, as a young man, Fraser left a promising engineering career to share the love of Jesus with the Lisu tribe in the foothills of the Himalayas.

One winter the snowstorms were so bad that Fraser was unable to visit and minister to the Lisu up the mountain for the entire winter. And he was stressed about how these new followers of Jesus would do without his support, fearful they'd return to demon worship in his absence.

Normally Fraser spent a couple of days traveling up the mountain, then a day ministering to a village, and then a couple more days in travel, and so on. That winter, he tried a prayer experiment. For the villages up the mountain that he couldn't reach, the days he would normally spend traveling to them and ministering to them were instead focused on praying for them.

And for the villages at lower elevation that he could still visit, he continued ministering to them in person, sharing the gospel, holding worship services. At winter's end, his prayer experiment over, Fraser traveled up the mountain and discovered that the Christians he was

unable to be with but prayed for disproportionately had grown far more in their relationship with Jesus than the Christians in the lower areas he had been busy gathering in person for ministry.

The article says that many missions experts think a key factor in the enormous spread of Christianity in China in the past fifty years is the revival that began among the highlanders of Lisu during winters when James Fraser stayed home and prayed.

And so as our ability to gather is currently limited, may we gather before God in prayer for each other.¹ When it comes to relationships about Jesus, prayer isn't to be an afterthought, it's essential, both in our current limitations and once they are past.

Next Step

This morning we've seen that relationships about Jesus have shared mission, affection, and prayer. The Philippians needed these kinds of relationships both for the struggles ahead, and in the words of verse 10, to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

You see the stakes were high for the Philippians, and they are for us. Everyone is in desperate need of the forgiveness and perfect love and healed relationships and healed hearts and victory over death and perfect rule that only Jesus can provide. And those of us who already know Jesus need more of Him in our lives and want to be found pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

So our church's next step this morning is to do something today to encourage relationships about Jesus in our church. Do something today, before the day is over, to share in His mission, affection, prayer. I promise this will do your soul and our church relationships good.

To get you thinking about what you could do today to encourage relationships about Jesus, I'll share examples from our church family during COVID-19. Like Sunday School teachers helping kids to take next steps with Jesus through Zoom Bible story meetings and through mailing biblical activities to kids and delivering a scripturally themed scavenger hunt. And parents teaching their kids how to study the Bible this summer.

And small groups gathering for encouragement, prayer, and Bible study online or outside and starting a new Bible study with neighbors meeting outside. And our worship and tech team continuing to lead us in praising God.

¹ https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/the_corona_virus_experiment. Accessed online 7/2/20.

And many calls, texts, emails, and handwritten notes checking in on each other and praying for each other. And Men's and Women's Ministries adding extra summer studies to make sure we keep encouraging each other spiritually in this challenging season. And kind words and warm greetings shared at Shirley Jones' memorial this week, as we remembered a woman who embodied relationships about Jesus.

And donating to our Food Pantry so that we can bless people in Jesus' name. And also making food deliveries to help neighbors in need. And bringing meals to people having babies or surgery, and even delivering home-baked bread, just because.

And freely giving of your finances, not holding back. Every church faces challenges now, but we don't have a financial challenge on top of the other challenges because of your gracious giving. We're positioned to take advantage of ministry opportunities today and in the future.

And coming together for small prayer gatherings. And sewing cloth masks to share. And writing a chalk note on a driveway to welcome a new baby home.

And the ESL team planning for the Fall, every single volunteer stepping up to say let's move the mission forward, if we need to figure out how to teach English and love people over Zoom, let's do it.

That's a lot of "Jesus-centered shenanigans" 😊 in a time of limitations. So way to go, and let's keep it up, every one of us doing something today to encourage relationships about Jesus. We'd love to hear what you and others in our church family are doing in this season, so post it on Facebook on this livestream's post.

And let's pray now about our relationships in Jesus and then celebrate Jesus making these relationships possible through the Lord's Supper...