



## Philippians 1:1-11

### LESSON OVERVIEW

#### ENTRANCE INTO FELLOWSHIP

A man named John slowly disappeared from the church he attended. He stopped attending Bible study. He gave up getting together with church friends and skipped a men's event he'd been invited to. His absence was so gradual that few people noticed he was no longer around.

But the pastor of John's church noticed, and he stopped by John's house one evening. John invited the pastor in to join him in front of the fire. The pastor listened patiently as John told him how he preferred to worship God surrounded by nature rather than surrounded by a lot of judgmental people. As John talked, the pastor reached out with a fireplace shovel and pulled a hot coal out of the fire onto the hearth. As John spoke about being an introvert and preferring to be alone, the coal cooled, its light dwindling, until eventually it was barely warm. Then the pastor pushed the coal back into the fire and it began to glow again as it absorbed heat from the embers around it. The pastor's unspoken message made its way to John's heart.

The pastor never had to say a word. Seeing that his point had been made, he politely ended the conversation and stood to leave. As the pastor left, John said, "I'll see you Sunday, Pastor." God created us to live in community. Paul makes this clear in the book of Philippians. The one who began a good work in us intended for that work to continue in the context of community. One of the ways we learn how to live with God is by living with the people in whom He dwells.

# Philippians 1:1–11

## DAY ONE



### Doctrine SAINTS

When Paul calls the Philippian believers “saints,” he is not referring to them as in the Roman Catholic tradition—venerated Christians from church history recognized for their works. Instead, in the New Testament, all Christians are saints. The word “saint” simply means “holy one.” Even though we are not always holy in practice, God views us as called out and set apart for Himself—a holy one in position and hopefully in practice.



### Doctrine ELDERS AND DEACONS (PHILIPPIANS 1:1)

There were two categories of leaders in the early church: elders (overseers) and deacons. Elders were referred to as overseers (as here) or shepherds (1 Peter 5:2) and are always referred to in the plural in the context of a local church (Acts 14:23). The apostle Paul set forth qualifications for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1–13. Deacons were apparently an outgrowth of the seven men chosen to handle supporting tasks in the first church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1–4).

# GRACE AND PEACE (PHILIPPIANS 1:1–2)

In 1765 John Fawcett was called to pastor a small congregation at Wainsgate, England. He labored there diligently for seven years on a meager salary. When he received a call to a much larger congregation, he decided to accept it. As the few possessions that he and his wife owned were loaded on their wagon, the church members came by and begged them to stay.

Touched by the outpouring of love, he and his wife began to weep. Mrs. Fawcett exclaimed, “Oh, John, I just cannot bear this. They need us so badly here.” And Fawcett said, “God has spoken to my heart as well. Tell them to unload the wagon.” This experience inspired Fawcett to write the classic hymn, “Blest Be the Tie,” the first line of which says, “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the greatest joys of a Christian’s life is entering into fellowship with other Christians. The word “fellowship” means “to have in common.” As a fellow believer and follower of Christ, you walk alongside others who share a common trust in Christ as their Savior as well as people with a common set of principles.

The Apostle Paul enjoyed that kind of relationship with the church in Philippi. On more than one occasion, the Philippian church sent gifts to Paul in support of his ministry, especially when he was incarcerated in Rome (Philippians 4:10–19). Paul’s thank-you letter to the Philippians expanded into a heartfelt primer on contentment and joy in the Christian life, not only for the first century but for the twenty-first century as well.

### SERVANTS AND SAINTS

*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: (Philippians 1:1)*

Has anyone ever responded to a favor you did by saying, “Thank you! You are such a saint to do that for me?” You may have felt a twinge of guilt because you certainly didn’t feel like a saint. Maybe just that morning you had spent extra time confessing your sins to God. Aren’t saints people like Mother Teresa?

It’s not biblical to judge a person as a saint on the basis of actions. In Philippians 1:1, Paul calls every Christian in Philippi a saint. It’s likely he didn’t even know many of them or the quality of their spiritual lives. So why were they “saints”?

In the New Testament, the word “saint” means “holy one” and refers to a person’s position before God—not his actions. In the Old Testament, the word “holy” was applied to many common, everyday objects—even pagan temple prostitutes—because they had been set aside for a specific purpose. Dr. J. Vernon McGee said, “Even the old pots and pans in the tabernacle were called ‘holy vessels’ though they were probably beaten and worn-out after 40 years in the desert. However, they had been ‘set apart’ for God’s use.”<sup>3</sup>



In light of this truth, why could Paul refer to all the Christians at Philippi as saints?

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It is not the way we live our life that qualifies us as saints, but rather the way Christ lived His life. Because Christ never sinned (Matthew 4:10–11; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 7:26–28), He was holy in practice and position. Even demons recognized him as “the Holy One of God!” (Mark 1:24). Paul refers to the Christians at Philippi as being “in Christ,” and that’s what makes them saints, or holy ones (Colossians 3:3). It is our faith in God’s true Holy One, Jesus Christ, that cleanses us from our sin in God’s sight and allows us to be called holy as well.

“In Christ” means two things in the New Testament: where we place our faith and where God sees us. We believe “in Christ” in order to become God’s child and a follower of Jesus (Galatians 3:26). From the moment we first believe, God sees us as “in Christ” with respect to our sins (Romans 8:1). We share in Christ’s holiness. Even when we sin, God sees us as forgiven and holy in His sight because He sees us “in Christ.”



How do you know that you are “in Christ” today?

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#### GRACE AND PEACE

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:2)*

Standard greetings today can run from formal (“How are you?”), to informal (“How’s it going?”), to familiar (“What’s up?”), to very familiar (“Sup?”). Our greetings are mainly conversation starters or polite gestures. In biblical days, greetings were more meaningful. The words were deeper, and they were spoken almost like a blessing. “Grace and peace to you” was the most common greeting among New Testament writers: Paul used it ten times; Peter used it twice, and John used it once. “Grace, mercy, and peace” was used twice by Paul and once by John.

In addition to its use in letters, “grace” (*charis* in Greek) also was a common spoken greeting, as if the person were to say, “Have a blessed day” or “Blessings be upon you.” Grace was the most distinctive theological idea in the New Testament. The English word “grace” appears only eight times in the Old Testament, but it appears 123 times in the New Testament.

“Peace” is the New Testament version of the Hebrew idea of *shalom*—peace, wholeness, or soundness. “Shalom” is used by Jews today as a greeting—a wish for peace and wholeness for those they meet. The root of the word



#### Doctrine

#### IN CHRIST

The phrase “in Christ” occurs 91 times in the English (NIV) New Testament. Paul’s promise of peace is to those who are “in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). Being “in Christ” simply means believing in Christ, being counted as a true believer, being baptized into Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). So the prerequisite for the peace of God is faith in Christ.

**Grace is receiving goodness that we do not deserve.**


**Mercy is not receiving punishment we do deserve.**

**Peace is living in the reality of mercy and grace.**



“shalom” is seen in the name *Jerusalem*, or “city of peace.” Ironically, Jerusalem is the most embattled city in the world and will not know true peace until the Prince of Peace returns.

The “peace” Paul used as a written greeting was not a reference to circumstantial peace, but a reminder of the peace of God extended to every Christian. It was a way of saying, “I trust you are walking in the peace of God, which life in Christ makes possible” (Philippians 4:6–7).

 What was your status with God before becoming a Christian? (Romans 5:10a; Colossians 1:21)


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 What is necessary before one can have and experience peace with God (Romans 5:1)?


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 In light of Ephesians 2:8–9, do you think there is a reason Paul said “grace and peace” instead of “peace and grace?”

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*Put Yourself in Their Shoes*  
 **THANKFUL APOSTLE**

Paul expressed thanks in prayer and in person for many of the Christians to whom he wrote: the Romans (1:8), those at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:4), the Colossians (1:3), the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3), Timothy (2 Timothy 1:3), and Philemon (verse 4).

*Responding to Scripture*

 What is Paul’s overall purpose in Philippians 1:1–2?

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What did Paul want the Philippians to know or understand about this purpose?

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*Responding to Life*

What is the main idea or truth you can take away from this lesson—a truth that will impact your life today?

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### Responding to God



**Heavenly Father,** thank You that, by your grace, I can have peace with You today through the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You for viewing me as a saint—a holy one—in spite of my sins and imperfections. I pray today to walk in Your grace and peace and to live my life as one set apart for Your service. In Christ's name I pray, Amen.

## GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION (PHILIPPIANS 1:3–5)

Philippians 1:1–11

DAY TWO

My daughter, Meggie, and her husband, David, belong to a wonderful faith community. I knew early on this was the case. While they were on their honeymoon, friends from their church came to their new little house (which was desperate for renovation) and applied a fresh coat of paint to the interior walls. You can imagine their gratitude and the love they felt when they returned home to a freshly painted house.

What if you were the only Christian in your community? Life would be a bit more challenging, wouldn't it? The fellowship of other believers is one of those aspects of life we sometimes take for granted, but one we would sorely miss if it was suddenly removed.

The Apostle Paul had good reason to be thankful for the Christian believers in Philippi. They had reached out to him while he was under house arrest in Rome, supplying him with material support, fellowship, and encouragement. He was so touched by their presence in his life that it is the first thing he mentions as he begins his letter to them.

#### GRATITUDE EXPRESSED IN PRAYER

*I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy. (Philippians 1:3–4)*

One day, a large basket arrived at my front door. It was filled with hundreds of handwritten notes from the women of my Bible study who had written to me for Valentine's Day. I can't tell you what their kindness meant to me. I slowly read each one, and I remember how many of them quoted Philippians 1:3: "I thank my God every time I remember you."

There is nothing like a dear friend in Christ. I believe you can know someone your entire life and yet not experience anything close to the bonds of a Christian friend you might have known only six months. There is transparency, acceptance, and understanding in Christian relationships, because every true believer has experienced the same humbling (guilty of sin) and lifting up (redeemed by grace). Everyone is on equal footing and common



ground before God. My friends within the faith community mean the world to me. Their prayers, support, and encouragement are priceless riches, impossible to find among those whose first loyalty is to something or someone other than God.

Likewise, the Philippians came to Paul's mind often, and every time they did he thanked God for them. Paul's attitude of gratitude toward his brothers and sisters in Christ is what every Christian should imitate.



When was the last time you expressed gratitude in a specific way to or for another Christian, either in person or in prayer?

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Why should we be grateful for other believers in general, even when they have done nothing specific for us?

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Most people sitting in prison would be writing others to ask for prayers for themselves. But Paul remained focused on praying for others, even in his own time of need. Paul was demonstrating the principle he wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:24: "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others." Explain what Paul meant in that verse. Should we never seek our own good in life?

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 What principles found in John 13:34–35 and John 15:13 did Paul exemplify?

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Even when we are not in physical proximity to those who are in need, why is prayer our single best means of serving them?

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A particular friend in Christ demonstrates this kind of concern for others. Cindy is known for her hugs, her love notes, and her joy in making others laugh. Even when faced with a crisis in her own life—her husband's terminal cancer—she never stopped loving others, never stopped showing





gratitude, and was always available to the many friends who depended on her as a source of strength. She continued to pray for others even when she was the one who likely needed prayers the most. That is the love of Christ. It was also the love of Christ in Paul that led him to pray for others, even while in difficult circumstances.

In the New International Version translation of the Bible (1994 version), the word “joy” and various forms of “rejoice” occur fourteen times in the four short chapters of Philippians. How did Paul manifest the intended result of all Jesus taught His disciples (John 15:11)?

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 In Psalm 16:11, where did the psalmist say he found joy?

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As a new Christian, one of the first books I read was *The Christian’s Secret to a Happy Life* by Hannah Whitall Smith. The “secret” about which she wrote was being “hid in Christ,” being totally surrendered to God and His purposes. A person hidden in Christ experiences true joy—joy that is rooted in Jesus Christ and His love for us—especially while we experience great difficulties. Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). This theme is what fuels Paul’s entire message throughout Philippians.

### Thankful for Persevering Partners in the Gospel

*Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. (Philippians 1:5)*

Would you have considered your partners in the Gospel a source of joy as Paul did? List your top three reasons for giving thanks for your partners in the Christian life. Why are you thankful for them?

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### Did You Know?

### JOY

“Joy” is a concept we find throughout Philippians. It’s in all of these verses: 1:4, 25–26; 2:2, 29; 4:1.

And the word “rejoice” can be found in verses 1:18; 2:17–18; 3:1; 4:4, 10.

These two words occur a total of 44 times in all of Paul’s epistles. Philippians is often referred to as “The Epistle of Joy.”






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At times when I am surrounded by those who are apathetic about their faith, I think about how I would fare if I were the only Christian in the world. How strong would I be? Could I be faithful without the encouragement of others, my co-laborers and partners in the Christian life? I seriously doubt it. When considering that possibility, I'm immediately made aware of how thankful I am for the fellow followers of Jesus who are part of my life. Here's how I would answer that last question above:

1. My family. I'm sure I sometimes take for granted the privilege and blessing of having a husband and four grown children who are Christ-followers. While each one of us grow in our own way as we try to follow Jesus, we can still pray for one another, be accountable to each other, and support one another in our faith. I am thankful for the shared faith of my family.

2. The leaders of the Women's Community Bible Study of Atlanta. I am often humbled by the commitment, maturity, and thoughtfulness of the women who form the leadership core of our Bible study. They are wise and willing and serve as continual sources of inspiration for me. From the church to the family and ministries in between, God has established a plurality of leaders as His design. I am thankful for the strength I get from the women with whom I serve.

3. The larger body of Christ. Every Christian is a "cell" in the Body of Christ that gains health and strength from every other strong cell. Whenever I am in a large gathering of Christians, whether it's my church, a conference, or a mission trip, I look around and realize I am part of something good and great that God is doing in the world. I realize there are many faithful believers—some I know, most I don't—who are persevering in the faith for Jesus' sake. I am so thankful for each one and for how I am encouraged by their faith.

### *Responding to Scripture*

What is Paul's main idea in Philippians 1:3–6?

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Summarize Paul's explanation of that idea in your own words:

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### *Responding to Life*

How should the truth of these verses impact your response to challenges and







difficulties you face in life? How might you use these verses to comfort another Christian who is going through a difficult time?

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### *Responding to God*



**Heavenly Father,** I thank You for my fellow Christians who care for me and to whom I can minister with the love of Christ. Please help me remember to show them my gratitude in word and deed. I praise and thank You that you began the work of faith in me, and You will bring it to completion; I don't have to depend on my efforts to save myself. Grant me the grace to rest in Your all-sufficient arms—to see every aspect of life as something You are using to conform me to Christ. In His name I pray, Amen.

## GOOD WORKS WITHIN (PHILIPPIANS 1:6–8)

The epitaph on the tombstone of the late Ruth Bell Graham reads “End of construction. Thank you for your patience.” These were words she chose herself from a construction sign. Mrs. Graham believed this was “a marvelous image for the Christian life, a work under construction until we go to be with God.”

Being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29) is a lifelong process. None of us has arrived; all of us are under construction. It's important to remember this fact about ourselves, but perhaps even more important to remember the same for those we come in contact with. Sometimes we are quick to forgive ourselves but not so quick to forgive others. Others of us struggle to get past our failings.

All of this is why Philippians 1:6 is so comforting. We consistently fail to live up to God's standards of righteousness, and we wonder if we are making any spiritual progress at all. We wonder if God will stick with us while we stumble through this life. We get tired of confessing our sins and witnessing the sins of those close to us. We wonder if God gets tired of hearing us. We are worn out and weighed down by sin, sometimes so much that we're almost embarrassed to ask God's forgiveness...again!

But verses like Philippians 1:6 and 1 Thessalonians 5:24 correct our unbiblical thinking. Who is committed to ensuring our spiritual progress—and arriving at our ultimate spiritual destination? God is.

Philippians 1:1–11

DAY THREE

**“Have you ever noticed the difference in the Christian life between work and fruit? A machine can do work; only a life can bear fruit.”**

**Andrew Murray**



Put Yourself in Their Shoes

FELLOWSHIP

To be arrested and imprisoned, as Paul was when he wrote to the Philippians, would have been a matter of great shame in his day; the equivalent of being a criminal. But the Philippians stood with Paul; they did not abandon him in his hour of trouble. Since fellowship refers to having all things in common (including suffering), it was as if the Philippians were in jail themselves. When Paul suffered, they suffered. This was the source of Paul's affection for them.

COMPLETE AND CONFIDENT

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. (Philippians 1:6)

How does Jesus' metaphor of the vine and branches in John 15:1-8 illustrate that our spiritual life draws on a divine source other than ourselves?

Handwriting lines for the response to the question about the vine and branches metaphor.

You and I can rest in these promises. It is not up to us to grow. It is up to us to be obedient and depend on Christ in all aspects of our lives. Any good work that comes from us is His doing. Branches can produce no fruit on their own, regardless of their effort, concentration, or sincere desire. Only by their union with the vine, from which comes life, can the branches bear fruit.

📖 According to Jesus, how much can we accomplish on our own, apart from Him (John 15:5b)?

Handwriting line for the response to the question about accomplishing on our own.

📖 What is our responsibility in the process of growth (John 15:7)?

Handwriting lines for the response to the question about responsibility in growth.

📖 How do the two verses in Romans 8:28-29 support God's role in our spiritual growth as summarized in Philippians 1:6?

Philippians 1:29, the goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Handwriting line for the response to the question about Philippians 1:29.

Philippians 1:28, God's part: \_\_\_\_\_

Handwriting line for the response to the question about Philippians 1:28.

Here is the good news: We can be confident that no matter how sinful we feel, or how often we fail, Jesus is full of mercy. He will forgive us and will continue to work everything "for the good of those who love him." God's work for us began when Christ died on the cross and was raised from the dead. His work in us begins when we accept Christ as our Savior and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us. And his work through us begins as we depend on the Spirit in our daily walk.





What measure of confidence do these verses on growth give you, especially in moments when you feel like a failure?

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Fill in the blank: I am confident of this, that he who began a good work in (your name) \_\_\_\_\_ will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Now take this sentence, memorize it, and hang it somewhere so you will be reminded of God's faithfulness.

#### FELLOWSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP

*It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for 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. (Philippians 1:7–8)*

Christian friendship is a treasure unlike any other friendship. When Christ is at the center, the bond goes deep. There is a natural sense of acceptance, forgiveness, and encouragement. We recognize that everyone sins, even our closest friends, and that we all need Jesus' forgiveness, not to mention each other's. On one hand, we walk in humility together, and on the other hand, we walk in total joy, because we have all experienced grace and mercy. A beautiful combination of humility and joy usually governs every friendship founded on Christ.

To experience true Christian friendship is to experience the unconditional love of God. When we experience the forgiveness of Christ in our own lives, it naturally overflows to others. Paul and the Philippians experienced the grace and mercy of Christ and freely gave it to one another.

I know women who have succumbed to the busyness of the world and had no time to gather with their Christian friends. A year or so later they came to realize nothing could replace being surrounded and uplifted by Christ-centered friends. Even if you don't have time for all the activities you once attended at church, the importance of time with those who can build you up in the faith is irreplaceable. Nothing comes close to the natural grace that Christian friends extend to one another. Friends in Christ don't love you because of what you do or who you have become. They love you in spite of what you do and have become—the same way God in Christ loves us (Ephesians 4:32).

Paul and the Philippian Christians were partners in Christ (as we will see in detail in Philippians 4). They were Christian friends. Their bond was strong, and their love was deep. Paul naturally missed them and "longed for all of [them] with the affection of Christ Jesus.

There is a real feeling that develops when you serve alongside someone in Jesus' name. It's in some ways miraculous and indescribable, but how would you describe it if you had to?

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#### Doctrine

### FRIENDSHIP


Friendship was a covenant term. In the Old Covenant, Abraham was the friend of God (Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). In the New Covenant, the disciples became the friends of God (John 15:13–15). Proverbs 18:24 says there is a friend "who sticks closer than a brother," as Jonathan did when David was in trouble (1 Samuel 19–20). Friends united by faith in Christ share a bond deeper than any other.





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 Summarize the teaching of Hebrews 10:24–25. Explain some things Christians should do with their words when they come together.


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*Responding to Scripture*

 In one sentence or short phrase, what is the central theme of Philippians 1:6–8?

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*Responding to Life*

What did you learn in this lesson that will make the biggest impact on your life?

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*Responding to God*



**Heavenly Father,** how incomprehensible that You love me as much as You do! I stumble each day, yet You love me in spite of who I am. Thank You for my fellow believers in Christ through whom I can experience the love of Christ. I am so grateful for all You and those in my faith community mean to me. I also thank You that You are always at work in me to transform me into the image of Your Son Jesus and You will continue that work until the day He returns. Father, how incomprehensible is Your love for me in Jesus Christ! Amen.

Philippians 1:1–11

DAY FOUR

GIFT OF PRAYER (PHILIPPIANS 1:9–11)

**B**ecause my husband was involved in television news media for many years, we witnessed the evolution of the “sound bite,” that short summary of a position captured in an interview and played on the

