

‘Let’s partner together - and make a difference

Bible Reading: Philippians 1:1-11

**Introduction:**

**Question:** What well-known and successful partnerships can you think of? (5 minutes)

Partnership is a powerful and invariably a beneficial thing – a concept that the apostle Paul wholeheartedly embraced. Two New Testament examples of these are Paul & Timothy, and Paul with Silas, travelling and sharing the good news of Jesus together. Another example is here in this letter to the Philippians, where Paul speaks warmly of his ‘partnership in the gospel’ with the church at Philippi.

*‘In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel’ (Philippians 1:5)*

**1. Partners and ‘slaves’**

‘Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus...’ (v.1)

From the very beginning of this letter, Paul introduces the concept of partnership – ‘Paul and Timothy...’. One commentator suggests that here Paul is reminding the Philippian Christians, (who had lots of relational struggles) that relationships between Christian partners are not those of authority, superiority or inferiority but rather of humble equality.

The reason for this is that Paul and Timothy, the Philippian Christians, and us: we all share the same status – we are ‘servants of Jesus’. It’s worth mentioning that the Greek word *doulos* that is used here is actually the word for a slave, rather than a servant!

The concept of slavery is rightly abhorrent to us. However, when we think that the master is Jesus, the concept immediately becomes a helpful one.

Elsewhere (2 Corinthians 5) Paul writes that when we become followers of Jesus, we become new creations (v.17). Not only this, but having become new creations, we are called to live ‘no longer for ourselves, but for Christ who died for us and was raised again’ (v.15).

**What difference would it make to your relationships if you began each day by accepting and owning the fact that you are a ‘slave’ of Jesus and called to live for his purposes?**

**What intentionally devotional steps might you take to help you to own and live out your status as a ‘slave’ of Jesus.**

**2. This partnership is for everyone**

‘To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.’ (v.1)

This partnership isn’t restricted to the church leaders – it’s for ‘all’.

**Have you ever considered yourself to be a partner in the gospel?**

**How do you feel about the idea of living your life as a partner in the gospel?**

**3. The criterion for this partnership is holiness**

‘To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi...’ (v.1)

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Paul presumes something about these Christians – that they are ‘holy people’. This word refers to something or someone set apart for a special (holy) purpose – usually God’s purposes.

Read Exodus 3:1-6 to get an idea of what the Bible means by the word ‘holy’.

**How might holiness be demonstrated in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? What might it look like?**

We sometimes talk about Christians living in ways that are counter to the prevailing culture.

**What values & characteristics might we as Christians want to display to reflect the holy character of Jesus?**

**Can you think of one or two (new to you) characteristics of Jesus that you could intentionally and prayerfully pursue?**

### 4. Values that deepen relationships – make for a great partnership

**‘Grace and peace** to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.’ (v.2)

Grace is the undeserved favour, forgiveness, and acceptance we receive from God through our acceptance of Jesus as our Lord and Saviour (cf. Ephesians 2:8–9).

This is the basis of Paul’s greeting to, and his relationship with the Philippian Christians.

**What would it be like if all our dealings with one another were on the basis of grace and peace?**

In the verses below we get to know even more about the values that lie behind this partnership:

**Prayer, affection and a desire for God’s best for others** (v.3,4,7,8)

*‘I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy...’*

*‘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.’*

Here we get a glimpse into the way that Paul’s life has been completely transformed. The one-time persecutor of Christians has become a loving father-in-the-faith.

**What might you learn from the deep sense of relationship that the apostle Paul expresses here?**

**Is there someone that God is bringing to your individual attention – that he wants you to support and pray for?**

**Is there a church or an emerging church, or even a person/couple that God is calling to his mission that he wants your church to love, support, pray and care for?**

**Spend 5 minutes prayerfully considering this, then share your reflections with each other.**

### 5. Partners with a clear purpose

**‘I thank my God... because of your partnership in the gospel...’** (v.5)

Paul’s life had been completely transformed and he was convinced that God had given him a life-changing message to share across the Mediterranean world. He wrote to the Colossians:

*‘(God) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.’* (Colossians 1:13)

In his paraphrase of the New Testament, Eugene Peterson expresses that same verse like this:

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'God rescued us from dead-end alleys and dark dungeons. He's set us up in the kingdom of the Son he loves so much, the Son who got us out of the pit we were in, got rid of the sins we were doomed to keep repeating.'

The word 'gospel' means good news.

**Is this your understanding? What do you honestly think of the gospel message?**

**Is it good news for everyone – or just for Christian-types; losers in the eyes of 'normal' people?**

**Do you regard the gospel as something that liberates and brings freedom or something that will cramp your style, or someone else's style?**

What you think about the gospel message is really important – because it will determine whether you're willing to share it or just keep 'shtoom'!

**Spend 5 minutes in groups of 3-4 trying to simply define what the gospel message is. Write it down and share it with others in your group.**

**Spend 10 minutes as a group exploring ways that you as individuals can show and share the gospel ('good news') of Jesus with your friends, neighbours, family colleagues...**

**Pray that God will help you individually and collectively to develop as 'partners in the gospel'.**

**Conclusion:**

There's so much more in this passage, but for now our focus is on the theme of 'partnership' in this passage.

**What's your 'take away' action from this study?**

**What is God asking of you – as an individual and as a church?**

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### **This partnership is for ‘all God’s holy people’**

‘To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons’

This is not a selective partnership – it was for all the Philippian church. As it was for them – so it is for us too. We’re all included in this. It’s not just for the ‘overseers and deacons’

### **Have you ever considered yourself to be a ‘partner in the gospel (the good news of Jesus)? What might this look like for you?**

Paul presumes something about these Christians – that they are ‘holy people’. This word refers to something or someone set apart for a special (holy) purpose.

This is partnership with a clear purpose -

### **v.2 Blessing others with kind words**

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

This was a familiar greeting for the apostle Paul