

STUDY GUIDE

PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
PHILIPPIANS: CITIZENS OF HEAVEN LIVING ON EARTH
COLLECTIVE GIFTEDNESS
PHILIPPIANS 1:1-6
08/27/2017



MAIN POINT

Our collective giftedness allows means we can accomplish God's will more effectively together.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do you prefer working with a team or working by yourself more?

What is an example of a project that would work better if you worked together with others?

Church is a team sport. Lone ranger Christians do not exist. God has redeemed individuals together into the collective group of the church to love and serve Him together. But why did God do it this way? The organization of God's church values both the individual members as well as the group. Each person has been given a particular spiritual gift to build the church and help spur her on in mission. Because everyone has a different gifting the church works best when we partner together.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2.

How are the Philippian believers described in verse 1?

As Christians, we are saints, set apart for God's service and living in the sphere of Christ's love and grace. "Saints" doesn't refer to an elite category of superspiritual believers but to all people redeemed by grace through faith in Christ—people set apart for God's service and for living by His lofty standards. We may not feel saintly now, but this is how God views us because we have been justified through Christ.

In contrast, how did Paul describe himself and Timothy in verse 1? What did this title imply?

Paul consistently greeted churches with grace and peace to you? Why do you think Paul regularly used the same greeting in his letters to churches?

In your own words, define grace and peace. What is the source of "grace and peace" for the Christian?

Grace is God's undeserved favor—His love in action. Peace is wholeness or soundness under His rule. Paul never varied the order of the terms; only on the basis of God's grace is wholeness possible.

Why are grace and peace important elements in church fellowship? How are they evident in our church?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6.

According to these verses, why was Paul thankful for the Philippian believers?

What type of relationship must Paul have had with them in order to pray like this? What does Paul's prayer for the Philippians teach us about our prayers?

How do you define joy? What does it mean to you that Paul said he prayed "with joy"? Is this something that characterizes your prayer life? If not, how could it be? Why should partnering with other believers bring us joy?

Paul prayed for his friends with joy because of his warm recollections of them and because of their faithfulness. He sounded for the first time what would become a prominent note in his letter: joy (or rejoicing). The Greek word for joy comes from the same root as the term grace. It conveys not just the emotion of happiness but also the sense of confident well-being that comes from a close relationship with God.

In what did the Philippian believers "partner" with Paul (v. 5)? Why can we do more for God by partnering with other believers?

What is your earliest memory of helping others spread the gospel? What is an example of direct involvement of spreading the gospel you have had more recently?

What type of relationships have you developed with the people you've partnered with for the sake of the gospel?

The Philippian Christians participated in Paul's efforts to spread the gospel; they shared his missionary zeal and contributed to his work. Persistently, even to the time Paul was writing his letter, they helped him by sending needed resources to further his ministry.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What would our church be like if Paul's prayer to the Philippians was fulfilled in our church? What could be the impact on our community?

How is our group partnering together for the gospel? What can we do this week to increase our impact?

What are some specific ways that our group can support and encourage our pastor and the rest of the church staff in their ministries, like the Philippian church encouraged Paul? Why do our pastors sometimes get excluded from this equation?

How has the Holy Spirit gifted you to serve the church? How are you using this gifting to serve?

PRAY

Thank God for the community of faith He has drawn together in the gospel. Praise the Lord for gifting the saints for service in the kingdom. Pray that we would be a people who joyfully come together with other believers to fulfill the mission of the church.

COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-6

Introduction to Philippians: The Letter to the Philippians was written while the apostle Paul was in prison probably from Rome about A.D. 62, though we cannot know for sure. Other possible locations for the writing of the letter could have been Ephesus or Caesarea (sometime between A.D. 54 and 62). The Philippian church was founded about A.D. 50–51, approximately a decade before the writing of the letter, during Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:12–40). Paul and Silas arrived in Philippi and apparently found no Jewish synagogue. There was, however, a place of prayer by the riverside where some women met on the Sabbath to pray. One of these women, Lydia, believed the gospel message Paul preached. As a result of her gratitude to God and to the missionaries, she opened her home to them. After the missionaries had settled in Philippi, they were arrested when Paul exorcised a demon from a slave girl because her masters aroused opposition against the preachers. They were beaten, thrown into prison, and fastened in stocks. Yet Paul and Silas were still able to praise God and sing hymns. While they were in prison, there was an earthquake, and all the doors were immediately opened. The events of the evening set the stage for the conversion of the jailor and his household. Through the ministry of Paul and Silas, many in Philippi became Christians, and a church was established (see Acts 16). When Paul and Silas, along with Timothy, left Philippi, Luke, the doctor, remained. Luke apparently did much to help stabilize the young congregation and enhance its outreach ministry. Philippi was a Roman colony located on the great northern east-west highway, called the Egnatian Way. Philippi took its name from Philip II, Alexander the Great's father. Just west of town near the Gangitis River, Antony and Octavian defeated Cassius and Brutus in 42 B.C. In 30 B.C. Octavian made the town a Roman colony for retired soldiers and bestowed upon Philippi the full privileges of Roman citizenship. The Philippians took great pride in their privileges as Roman citizens and lived as faithful citizens of Rome, a point to which Paul appealed for illustration purposes in 3:20. (David S. Dockery et al., *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 719.)

1:1-2. Paul was in prison in Rome, probably about A.D. 63. The Philippian believers had learned of his location and had sent a church member, Epaphroditus, to deliver a gift to him and to stay with him. Epaphroditus had become gravely ill but had recovered, so Paul sent him back with a letter that explained Epaphroditus's early return and gave information about his situation, addressed problems in the church, and expressed appreciation for the Philippian believers' support.

Paul identified himself and greeted the Philippian believers. His including Timothy in the greeting does not indicate Timothy co-wrote the letter; rather, Timothy was Paul's valued coworker who had been with the apostle in Philippi on the second missionary journey (see Acts 16:1-12). The Philippian Christians knew and respected Timothy (see Phil. 2:22). With genuine humility, Paul described himself and Timothy as slaves of Christ Jesus. The Greek word translated slaves literally means "bondslaves." The noun probably comes from a verb that means "to tie" or "to bind." A bondslave was totally subservient to his master's will. Paul and Timothy were at their Lord's disposal. The phrase Christ Jesus identified Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and Savior.

Paul's letter was addressed to all the Philippian believers. He used the word all nine times in his letter—perhaps to stress that he excluded no one from his deep love or from his gratitude for the church's expression of care for him. He also may have wanted to underscore at the letter's beginning that the congregation was to be united. The word saints should be understood as a synonym for Christians. All Christians are in Christ Jesus—they live in the sphere of His lordship. Paul's phrase in Christ was another way to designate people committed to Christ.

Paul included the church's overseers and deacons in his greeting. At this time in church history, these terms primarily designated functions, not offices. Overseers probably were elders—older men with leadership responsibilities. Deacons were involved in ministering to church members' needs. Paul may have mentioned these church leaders in particular because they had recommended and supervised the collection of the church's gift to him.

Paul's consistent prayer for recipients of his letters was grace and peace. As Christians' Father in the best possible sense, God provides grace and peace. Through faith in Christ, we become members of His family—His children. We live in His compassionate care. Paul's full designation the Lord (Deity) Jesus (Savior) Christ (Messiah) emphasized the Son's role in supplying grace and peace.

1:3-6. In his conversations with God, Paul remembered his positive, productive experiences with the Philippian Christians. The word praying conveys continuous action and has the idea of asking God to meet a need. In particular, Paul's petitions for the Philippian believers were infused with joy because of their partnership in the gospel. The term partnership translates the Greek word *koinonia*, which comes from a verb meaning "to share," "to associate oneself with," "to be made a partner."

Paul expressed his confidence in the Philippian Christians' continued spiritual growth. His certainty was not based on his ability or on their efforts but on God, who had started a good work in them. The beginning of God's good work occurred when the believers placed their faith in Christ. By His grace, God would carry their salvation on to completion (fully finish it). Paul and the Philippian believers shared in a common enterprise: spreading the gospel. They were joint participants in God's redemptive purpose. Here the term grace referred to Paul's missionary ministry. With a solemn oath, Paul declared his intense, eager yearning to be reunited with his friends. Christ Jesus was the Source of Paul's deep desire. Through Paul, Christ's love reached out to his friends. The relationship between Paul and the church went deeper than human friendships. They had a tie that came from joining in the work of God in the world. Such cooperation in the spread of the gospel was something Paul appreciated very much. That fellowship was with Paul only in an intermediate sense; the ultimate contribution they made was to the spread of the gospel itself. (Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 56.)

When Paul thanked God for their fellowship "in [eis] the Gospel," he meant that they were contributing to the spread of the gospel in tangible ways, i.e., primarily through their support. The gospel was not only the environment of their fellowship but also its goal. Had it not been for the gospel, they would not have met. Paul generally stated that the tie that bound Christians together was the gospel message. Here, however, the construction suggests that the advancement of the gospel united them. In their support of Paul, they contributed to the work of God in the world through the gospel. When the Philippians were converted, they were given a privilege of promoting the gospel. Through their relationship with Paul, they were true to that aspect of their faith. (Melick, 56–57.)

The first characteristic of Paul's thanksgiving for them was that it was joyful. The Greek text stresses this by placing the words "with joy" before the words "I always pray." This is the first reference to joy, a major theme in the epistle. The apostle is confident of what God has already done and knows that the God who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion. When God starts a work in our lives, beginning with our salvation, he will finish it. As believers, we are to grow in the Christian life becoming more like Christ each day. This is called sanctification. Spiritual growth should continue in committed believers until the day of Christ Jesus, that is until Christ returns again to the earth as the angels predicted (Acts 1:11). (Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, vol. 8, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 208.)