

A LETTER FROM PRISON



THE PARADOX OF JOY IN SUFFERING
paul's letter to the philippian church

Week 1: The Privilege of Partnership

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.
~ Philippians 1:4-5

INTRODUCTION – How It All Began

Acts 16:9-40

Look To The Book

Philippians 1:1-11

- Paul presents himself as an equal partner with Timothy, even though evidence suggests he is the key author of the letter and certainly the key leader of their mission.
- All Christ-followers are called **saints** (or holy ones) – people set apart for a special purpose.
- Some church structure is hinted at (i.e., Overseers and Deacons), although leaders are viewed as servants within the family rather than over-and-above the family.
- **Grace** is a Gentile greeting. **Peace** is a Jewish greeting. Paul's expectation for the New Testament church was radical sociological unity.
- **Joy** is a central theme. Even though Paul writes from a point of suffering, he expresses joy or encourages rejoicing approximately sixteen times in this short letter.
- **Partnership** (Greek = *koinonia*; sharing together, fellowship) is another dominant theme. We all have the privilege of partnering with God and with each other to serve our world with truth and love.
- Paul expected that Christ-followers would **defend** and **demonstrate** the Gospel.
- Paul is so aligned with the heart of Jesus that he emotes with the feelings of Jesus.
- Paul prays that his readers (hearers) would grow in **love**, **knowledge**, and **discernment** in order to embrace what is **best** (not just what is right vs. what is evil). He desires that their faith would cause them to grow in internal wisdom regarding ethics rather than just preaching an external system of rules and regulations that all Christians must be in conformity to.

So What?

TAKE OUT #1: Churches are families where leaders are first of all family members. Positions of authority are never our primary identity.

TAKE OUT #2: The Gospel is a methodically, doggedly unswervingly **relational** message about a thoroughly **relational** worldview. It is all about ongoing vertical and horizontal loving partnership.

TAKE OUT #3: Christians are called to live in tune with suffering – globally and locally, personally and socially, emotionally and practically – so that we see suffering as opportunity. Certainly, whenever intense suffering comes to us, we will not be surprised by it.

TAKE OUT #4: We should learn to see everything that happens to us, positive and negative, as a strategic opportunity to advance the Gospel.

TAKE OUT #5: Our ethics should rise out of the soil of discerning love, rather than descend upon us in the form of religious law. Likewise, our goal should be to seek the *highest* good rather than the *allowable* good.

CONCLUSION – Are You Seeking The Highest Good?

On your own time, (hopefully before Home Church this week) assess your life in the following categories. Rate yourself out of 10 regarding how well you fulfill Paul's prayer in **Philippians 1:9-11**. Think about your next steps toward health in each area.

Friends	Family	Work	School
/10	/10	/10	/10
Romance	Entertainment	Hobbies	Health
/10	/10	/10	/10
Volunteering	Evangelizing	Internal life	Other
/10	/10	/10	/10

HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS...

WARMING UP...

1. Take time to review this week's message, sharing as you go those things that most challenge, puzzle, or encourage you.

LOOK TO THE BOOK...

2. Read **Philippians 1:1-11** in various translations if possible. a) What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why? b) Do you tend to think of yourself primarily as a *saint* or a *sinner*? Why? What impact does your self-assessment have on your life? c) Notice that Paul is completely confident regarding God's work in and through the Philippiian believers, yet he still prays diligently for them. What lessons do we learn about the nature and purpose of prayer from this? d) Are there things you could implement in your Home Church to increase your experience of *koinonia* (partnership, fellowship, shared experience)?

SO WHAT?...

3. Take a few minutes to quietly meditate on **Philippians 1:9-11**. Now reflect back on the self-assessment in the conclusion of the sermon notes (above). In what area do you most need God's grace and conviction to help you grow (your lowest score)? Talk specifically about this with each other (to the degree that you feel is right). Brainstorm next steps toward increased health and pray for each other. (This is *koinonia*.)

Bruxy Cavey @ THE MEETING HOUSE – Sunday, June 24 / July 1, 2007