



Praying with Joy

Philippians 1:1-11



Introductory Matters

The book of Philippians is a letter. Thus we should ask: *Who* wrote it? *To whom* was it written? *When* was it written? *Why* was it written?¹ The letter begins with a greeting (1:1-2) which answers two of these questions. Read Philippians 1:1-2.

✎ *Author:* Paul.²

1. To whom was the letter written? What does Paul call the recipients of the letter?

✎ *Recipients:*³

✎ *Date:* Likely sometime between AD 60 and 62, from prison in Rome.⁴

✎ *Purpose:* To thank the Philippian Christians for their support (4:10, 14, 18). To commend Epaphroditus and explain his delay (2:25-30). To explain his own circumstances (1:22-26). To instruct and encourage them in their faith, and warn them about false teaching.

After the greeting, Paul proceeds with thanksgiving and prayer. Read Philippians 1:3-11.

Thanksgiving

2. How does Paul feel when he thinks about, and prays for, the Philippian Christians? Why does he feel this way? (1:3-6)⁵

3. What is Paul confident about in verse 6? What does this mean?⁶

¹ To answer these questions we should first read the entire letter. The author and recipients are often identified at the beginning of a letter. The purpose of a letter is usually evident in its content. Sometimes these questions are difficult to answer. For additional help, Study Bibles, Bible handbooks and commentaries address these kinds of questions.

² Both Paul and Timothy are mentioned (1:1) but it's evident that the apostle Paul (Timothy's mentor) is the primary human author of the letter (e.g., 2:19-24). Paul refers to Timothy and himself as 'servants of Christ Jesus.'

³ The letter is addressed to 'God's holy people (saints) in Christ Jesus in Philippi' (1:1). 'God's holy people' refers to believers, who are 'holy people' because of their union with Christ. The Philippian church was started when Paul, Timothy, Luke and Silas visited Philippi in the early 50s (see Acts 16). The letter is addressed to 'all' the Christians but Paul specifically mentions the 'overseers' (church leaders, elders) and 'deacons' (designated servants).

⁴ Paul says he is 'in chains' – that is, in prison (1:7, 13, 14, 17). He mentions the 'palace guard' (1:13) and 'Caesar's household' (4:22). It's reasonable to think he is facing his first imprisonment in Rome, which is dated AD 60-62.

⁵ Paul is very thankful to God. When he prays for the Philippian Christians, he always 'prays with joy.' Paul prays with joy 'because of [their] partnership in the gospel' (1:5). This 'partnership' means the Philippian Christians have been working along with Paul (including their support of Paul) to spread the 'gospel' (good news) of Jesus Christ.

⁶ The Philippians have been Paul's partners in the gospel 'from the first day until now' (1:5). This has been *God's* work, and Paul knows that God will continue his 'good work in [them]' until it is finally completed. While including their 'partnership in the gospel,' this 'good work' likely refers to the outworking of their salvation in the broadest sense. The 'day of Christ Jesus' refers to Christ's return when God's salvation will be fully realized.

4. Is becoming a Christian an “inside change” or an “outside change”?⁷ Who makes this change? Why is it important to understand this?⁸



5. What “outside changes” showed Paul that God had begun his work in the Philippians?

As Paul thinks about the Christians in Philippi, he is filled with thanksgiving and joy. These brothers and sisters are his “partners in the gospel,” and they continue to support Paul even in prison.⁹ They have a special place in Paul’s heart (1:7) and Paul wants to be with them (1:8).¹⁰

Prayer

Paul’s prayers include thanksgiving, but they also include “intercession” (making requests to God on behalf of others). Read Philippians 1:9-11.¹¹

6. What does Paul pray for, and why? What is needed for Paul’s prayer to be answered? What is the goal?



7. Paul’s prayer is a good example for us. What should *we* be praying for – for other Christians and also ourselves? What is *our* part in seeing such prayers answered?

Reflection & Application

- Though imprisoned, Paul was full of thanksgiving, joy, and love because of his relationship with God. Do you share Paul’s feelings? Do you need to enter into a relationship with God?
- Brothers and sisters, what are you praying for? Review Paul’s prayer and begin praying in a similar way for others, and yourself. Seek to understand and live out “what really matters.”

⁷ Questions 4 and 5 were taken from the workbook *Discipleship Explored: International Student Edition* [based on Philippians] (Epsom, England: The Good Book Company, 2009), 7. See www.christianityexplored.org.

⁸ This question is asked to point out that ‘becoming a Christian’ is not merely changing behaviors, including going to church activities or being baptized. The Bible talks about a spiritual change – a ‘new birth’ effected by the Holy Spirit (*John 3:3-7; 1:12-13; 1 Peter 1:3; Titus 3:5*). This fundamental change occurs by God’s grace and is received through faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sin and shame, and arose from the dead (*Ephesians 2:8-9*). However, the ‘inside change’ should be seen in an ‘outside change’ (*Ephesians 2:10*).

⁹ Whether Paul is in prison or ‘defending and confirming the gospel,’ the Philippian Christians are partners with him in God’s grace (1:7). They stick with him! Paul’s ‘defense (*apologia*) and confirmation of the gospel’ includes his defending and confirming the truth and integrity of the gospel. This may refer to Paul’s defense in the Roman court, but likely refers to all of his defense and confirmation of the gospel, including his efforts prior to his imprisonment.

¹⁰ God knows how much Paul loves the Philippians (1:8). Paul ‘longs for all of them with the affection of Christ.’ Christ’s love has filled Paul’s heart, and Paul loves the Philippians with Christ’s love.

¹¹ ‘abound more and more’ – continue to increase, and overflow; ‘insight’ – ability to understand clearly, especially in a moral sense; ‘discern’ – understand or judge correctly; ‘what is best’ – ‘what really matters’ (*NLT*); ‘pure and blameless’ – morally right attitude and behavior; ‘fruit’ – result (produced by the Spirit of God); ‘righteousness’ – in this context, likely means morally right character – similar to the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ (see Galatians 5:22-23).