

POWERFUL FELLOWSHIP

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

*WHEN WE BECOME CHRISTIANS WE ARE WOVEN INTO A
POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHER BELIEVERS.*

OUTLINE

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We Are To Be Thankful That God Has Given Each One Of Us Full Partnership.

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- B. POWERFUL LIVING (10)
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POWERFUL FELLOWSHIP PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

Let's keep in mind that we are reading a personal letter. The whole book follows the common pattern of first century letter writing. Verses 1-11 function as the introduction. Standard introductions consisted of the letter writer's name, in this case Paul and Timothy, the recipient's name, in this case the Philippian church, and a greeting, which Paul offered to them as grace and peace. Verses 3-8 will continue the ancient letter writing format by offering thanksgiving and verses 9-11 will offer the customary prayer. The interesting thing about this letter is that Paul has managed to mention all of the major themes of this letter in his introduction. The supremacy of Jesus, love, partnership, unity, perseverance, sanctification and joy are all mentioned up front. He will go into more detail as the letter progresses.

Last week we were reminded that our lives are to center around Jesus. In other words, we find freedom in life as we surrender our lives to Jesus. We are servants in God's Kingdom. We find power for living righteous and upright lives as we learn to accept the fact that we are all saints in God's Kingdom. We find peace and joy as we learn to receive all of life as a gift from God. All that we have and all that we are comes to us by grace as children of God's Kingdom.

This morning, we are going to expand on what it means to be a citizen of God's kingdom. If we were to put this in "*Purpose Driven Life*" terms, we could say that last week centered on worship, our relationship to God, and this week we will be talking about fellowship.

This morning, we are going to have two ceremonies that help us to visualize fellowship. First, we are going to receive one family into our congregation through membership. They have chosen to join our local fellowship. Secondly, we are going to dedicate a baby to God. In other words, we are stating publicly that we are going to help the parents raise this child up into God's family.

Sometimes the ceremonies can go badly. For example, one Sunday morning, I was dedicating a little boy at the end of the service. Right at the end of the baby dedication, his older brother broke out in tears and started weeping uncontrollably. His father went over to him and held him. He asked, "What's wrong son?" The boy said, "Pastor said that he wanted us brought up in a good Christian home. ... I want to stay with you guys."

I'm sure that won't happen this morning, because this little boy doesn't have any older brothers or sisters. And then at the end of service, we are going to give all of you a chance to partnership with us in fellowship. Henry, the director of small groups, is going to pass out a survey. Please take time to fill it out. Small group is a way in which we can partnership with one another.

We have recently finished our second time through the "*Purpose Driven Life*" series. Fellowship is one of the major purposes in our individual lives and in the life of the church. I have understood this all along. However, as I studied through this morning's text, I think I came to realize why true fellowship is so powerful.

We defined fellowship as meeting the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of one another. However, I'm not sure I thought about how God is involved in the process. I just figured, since you are my brother or sister in Christ, then I should be willing to help meet your needs. In other words, fellowship seems to be our relationship to one another. Worship seems to be our relationship to God. But if we were to stop and think about it, if fellowship is simply our relationship person to person, then it is probably doomed to failure. I know you'll probably find this hard to believe but I'm not always pleasant to be around. I'm sure I do things that make others angry. I'm sure I hurt others' feelings. I'm sure I'm not always motivated to do good to others. So as I have preached through fellowship, I'm sure I have left this morning's concept out. Listen to what Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 4:12:

*"Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves,
a cord of three strands is not quickly broken."*

Human to human relationship is a step in the right direction, but a third person is needed to make it powerful. Let me try to make this clear. Fellowship starts with each of us being in a relationship with God. God is in us and we are in Him. We learn to submit to His will. In other words, we as individuals are involved in a partnership with God. When we fellowship with one another, we are ministering to one another and being ministered to by God and the other. There is a dynamic

interplay between the three of us. God is working and flowing through me. God is working and flowing through you. We are being woven into one. There is mystical power in true fellowship.

Here is the main idea of this morning's passage. **WHEN WE BECOME CHRISTIANS WE ARE WOVEN INTO A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHER BELIEVERS.** In this morning's text we will see Paul use the word *partnership*. It is the same Greek word used for fellowship, *koinonia*.

As I said earlier, this letter follows the conventional form of first century letter writing. The introduction continues with an offering of thanksgiving and then a prayer. But since Paul has already stressed the fact in the address portion of his letter that all of life centers around Christ Jesus, he wants us to know that Christian thanksgiving, Christian prayer, and Christian fellowship is more than a cordial greeting. They are infused with the power of Jesus Christ.

I. THE POWER OF THANKFULNESS (VS 3-8)

We Are To Be Thankful That God Has Given Each One Of Us Full Partnership.

In verses 3-8 we are introduced to the power of thankfulness. In other words **WE ARE TO BE THANKFUL THAT GOD HAS GIVEN EACH ONE OF US FULL PARTNERSHIP.** It's kind of interesting that we just finished about a year long study through the book of Proverbs because we learned how to identify the marks of Hebrew poetry. Paul will use some of that poetic style in this letter. Poetry is something that lovers write to one another. It expresses concepts often too emotional for simple narrative. Keep in mind, Hebrew poetry operates on parallel thoughts and words, not on rhyme or meter. Please look at your text and see how verses 3-8 work from bookend parallels and work their way inward. Verses 3 and 8 talk about Paul's longing affection for the Philippians. Verses 4 and 5 parallel verse 7 in describing the partnership they enjoy in the ministry. And verse 6 is the climax of the section, defining why the partnership is so powerful and why Paul has good reason to give thanks.

A. POWERFUL THANKFULNESS (3 & 8)

Let's start with the bookends, verse 3 and verse 8 in their description of powerful thankfulness. Paul is sitting in a jail cell in Rome awaiting his verdict. He doesn't know if he will be executed or set free. One of the things that keep him going is the fond memories he has of his friends in the Philippian church. Each time Paul remembers his friends there, he thanks God, he is filled with joy, and he prays for them. He knows he can count on their friendship. Look how powerful this love is. In verse 8 Paul says, "*God can witness how much I long for you.*" The word for witness is same word we get our English word *martyr* from. How much does Paul desire to be with the Philippians? How much does he love them? He longs for them, look at the last phrase in verse 8, "*with the affection of Christ Jesus.*" The word *affection* has to do with the guts of a person, the heart the liver, etc. God testified to His own love for us by allowing Jesus to die for our sins. Do you see how that word "*testify*", "*martyr*" is working here? Paul says that he would die to be together with his friends in Philippi. Jesus said that the greatest expression of love is for one to lay down their life for their friends. Paul passionately loves God. Paul passionately loves the Philippians. God passionately loves Paul. God passionately loves the Philippians. The Philippians passionately love God. The Philippians passionately love Paul. Isn't that something to be thankful for? Just imagine what our church would look like if each one of us passionately loved God and passionately loved one another, all the while experiencing God's passionate love for all of us. That would evoke some powerful thanksgiving from us.

B. POWERFUL FELLOWSHIP (4-5 & 7)

And as verses 4, 5, and 7 point out, it would bring about some powerful fellowship. As we read through the book of Philippians we get the idea that this church is Paul's favorite. It doesn't seem right that Paul should have favorites and it certainly doesn't seem right that pastors have favorites. But look at verses 4 and 5. He prays with joy because of their partnership with him in the gospel. That word partnership is the same root word as fellowship. Let's continue on with the theme of fellowship. We said in the "*Purpose Driven Life*" series that fellowship was our responsibility to meet one another's physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. Now here is what adds power to fellowship. God gave Paul a mission to reach unbelievers with the gospel message. That message was that we are lost in sin and alienated from God. It is only through placing our faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus that we can find forgiveness for our sin and reconciliation with God. Paul was spreading that message throughout the world. God gave the Philippian church the same mission. They were spreading the gospel message all through the city of Philippi and they were supporting Paul with money and prayers so he could accomplish his mission. Paul prayed for the Philippians, preached to them, and sent them letters in support of their mission. They are meeting one another's physical, spiritual, and emotional needs as they are working to

accomplish God's will for their lives. Did you catch that little addition? They are not just meeting one another's' needs just to meet needs, they are meeting one another's' needs as each attempts to fulfill their destinies in Christ Jesus. That builds love. That builds intimacy. That builds a bond. Paul can't help himself for loving them more than other churches.

This brings us to the parallel in verse 7. Paul defends himself. He says, "I can't help myself for loving you more. You stood by me in the good times when I was preaching and teaching with power. You have not abandoned me now that I'm in jail. In fact you continue to support me and minister to my needs even now. You have shared all of God's graces and gifts with me. How can I not keep you as a favorite?" Look at the word *share* in verse 7. It takes the word fellowship and combines it with the words *together with*. So Paul is taking the intensely passionate and intimate word *fellowship*, and intensifying it a level higher by combining with the words *together with*. They are more than partners. In fact, the Philippians sent money and people to minister to Paul's needs while he was in jail at Rome. That's what I call real fellowship. That's what I call powerful fellowship.

C. POWERFUL CONFIDENCE (6)

Paul has a good feeling about the ministry he shares with the Philippian church. Verse 6 describes some powerful confidence. Let's keep this in context. Paul is confident in the ongoing thankfulness, prayer, and joy he will share with the Philippians. He is also confident in their continued fellowship with them. Paul is confident that God will continue to complete the work of spreading the Gospel to the nations and to the city of Philippi through Paul and the Philippians. Before I take this a little bit out of context, let me describe what I think this verse means for us at Devon Church.

God has given each one of us a mission in life. We all have personal destinies to fulfill in Christ. He is working in us and empowering us as individuals. He has given our church missions and assignments to complete as a church body. He has given individual missionaries that have gone out from us mission assignments. Powerful fellowship is when we meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of one another as we all complete our assignments. God works in and through all of us through one another. We support our missionaries with prayer and money. We help one another through the rough periods in life. We help one another to stand and go on. Each one of us has a mission. Each one of us has something to contribute. We are full partners in the Kingdom of God. God is the One Who has started us on our missions. He will ensure that it will all get done.

Now I'd like to take this verse a little bit out of context and apply it to our salvation. Paul will explain this later as well. The Bible never looks at salvation as a one-time deal alone. Salvation comes in three stages. One part of salvation is something that happens once. When you and I confessed our sin and gave our lives to Jesus, we were saved. The Bible calls that *Justification*. So we were saved. Salvation is also future. We will be saved. There will come a time when time comes to an end and we stand face to face before Jesus. He will give us resurrection bodies and we will live with Him forever in heaven. We will be made perfect. The Bible calls this *Glorification*. But there is that time between when we were justified and when we will be glorified. It is the time we live in now. We are in the process of being saved. In other words, we are growing as Christians. We are becoming better people. We are accomplishing the missions God has given us. This process of being saved is called *Sanctification* in the Bible. We are being made more holy day by day. We have been saved. We are in the process of being saved. We will be saved. God started the work in us. He made us full partners in His Kingdom. He has given us assignments that we will complete together with Him and with one another. That is something to truly be thankful for. **WE ARE TO BE THANKFUL THAT GOD HAS GIVEN EACH ONE OF US FULL PARTNERSHIP.**

II. THE POWER OF PRAYER (VS 9-11)

As Full Partners In The Kingdom Of God; We Are To Be Growing In Wisdom, Virtue, And Love.

Powerful fellowship is built on thankfulness. It is also built on the power of prayer as described in verses 9-11. **AS FULL PARTNERS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, WE ARE TO BE GROWING IN WISDOM, VIRTUE, AND LOVE.** Paul prays this will all come to pass in the life of the Philippians. Remember, he already said that he prays with thankfulness, joy, and confidence for them. This is really a model of how we can pray for one another. But further it is a good road map to see how we are progressing in the sanctification process.

A. POWERFUL LOVE (9)

Powerful love is described in verse 9. Paul wants them to keep this idea of their lives being woven together through God's love for each individual, to each individual's love for God, to each individual's love for each other. Love has to be woven together with the cord of three. He prays that their love grow. Jesus said that the world will know that He is our Lord if we love one another. The Apostle John said that if we don't love one another, it is impossible to love God. He also said that it is impossible to love one another if we don't love God. God first loved us. One good test to see how we are doing as Christians is to reflect on how much we are loving God and loving one another. Our lives should be more and more characterized by forgiveness, unity, love, and care for one another.

This is not sentimental love. This is love as a choice. Paul prays that their love abound more and more in practical knowledge and moral insight. In other words, one of our goals as partners in God's Kingdom is to grow in wisdom. We do that by reading, studying, and memorizing our Bibles. We do that by being in small groups and discipleship experiences. We do that by living pure and holy lives. We grow in wisdom in the context of holy community.

B. POWERFUL LIVING (10)

Now look at verse 10 because Paul pulls off a little poetry again. In verse 9 he said that our love should grow in knowledge and moral insight. The first half of verse 10 describes the growth of knowledge the second half of the verse describes growth in moral behavior. Verse 10 describes powerful living. Hopefully as we grow as believers, our choices are no longer between good and evil ... they become choices between what is good or better. We can only help one another as we grow in our ability to know, understand, and apply God's Word. Our community should be dedicated to this.

And secondly, we should be growing in our moral behavior. Each year that passes, we should see our behavior changing without becoming judgmental of others. You see, we are not necessarily getting rid of bad behavior, although we should be doing that as well, but we should be letting behaviors that perhaps are neutral or even good go to embrace better ways of behaving. As we grow in knowledge and behavior, we will be growing in wisdom. That is powerful living.

C. POWERFUL RESULTS (11)

And verse 11 lays out for us the results of powerful love and powerful living. We will start to see powerful results. We will be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. In other words, our lives will truly be living sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to God. Jesus will start to produce the fruits of holy living in us. We will see many wonderful things done here through our church family at Devon. We truly will affect the ends of the earth. And when people come here they will experience love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control in our lives. As they see God's Kingdom moving forward through us, God will get all the glory and praise because He is indeed the One Who is completing the good work He started in each one of us. **AS FULL PARTNERS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, WE ARE TO BE GROWING IN WISDOM, VIRTUE, AND LOVE.**

Paul places these lessons in the context of prayer. We forget that in our partnership with one another and with God, we can make great things happen. It is our duty to pray for one another. We are intimately connected to one another. **WHEN WE BECOME CHRISTIANS WE ARE WOVEN INTO A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHER BELIEVERS.** I hope that one thing we have accomplished this morning is that we have a deeper and perhaps a more mystical view of fellowship. When we fellowship with one another, we are actually partnering with God and with one another to accomplish great things for God's kingdom. Let me just demonstrate that principle in terms of prayer.

III. EPILOGUE

I don't know where this story came from, but I'm sure all sorts of these incidents are happening daily in God's Kingdom, and hopefully we will have a new and powerful vision for fellowship.

A missionary on furlough told this story while visiting his home church in Michigan.

"While serving at a small field hospital in Africa, every two weeks I traveled by bicycle through the jungle to a nearby city for supplies. This was a journey of two days and required camping overnight at the halfway point. On one of these journeys, I arrived in the city where I planned to collect money from a bank, purchase medicine and supplies, and then begin my two-day journey back to the field hospital.

Upon arrival in the city, I observed two men fighting, one of whom had been seriously injured. I treated him for his injuries and at the same time talked to him about the Lord.

I then traveled two days, camping overnight, and arrived home without incident. Two weeks later I repeated my journey. Upon arriving in the city, I was approached by the young man I had treated. He told me that he had known I carried money and medicines. He said, 'Some friends and I followed you into the jungle, knowing you would camp overnight. We planned to kill you and take your money and drugs. But just as we were about to move into your camp, we saw that you were surrounded by 26 armed guards.'

At this I laughed and said that I was certainly all-alone in that jungle campsite. The young man pressed the point however and said, 'No, sir, I was not the only person to see the guards. My five friends also saw them, and we all counted them. It was because of those guards that we were afraid and left you alone.'"

At this point in the sermon, one of the men in the congregation jumped to his feet and interrupted the missionary and asked if he could tell him the exact day this happened. The missionary told the congregation the date, and the man who interrupted told him this story,

"On the night of your incident in Africa, it was morning here and I was preparing to go play golf. I was about to putt when I felt the urge to pray for you. In fact, the urging of the Lord was so strong; I called men in this church to meet with me here in the sanctuary to pray for you. Would all of those men who met with me on that day stand up?"

The men who had met together to pray that day stood up. The missionary wasn't concerned with who they were. He was too busy counting how many men he saw. There were 26.

Let us leave here this morning with a new and improved view of fellowship. It is not just me ministering to you or you ministering to me. It is a full partnership in the Kingdom of God. It is God working in and through me. It is God working in and through you. It is you and I working in each other's lives intertwined with God's power, presence, and working. We are partnering with God and with each other to accomplish God's will.