

Philippians 1:1-11 — Joy In Loneliness

May 3, 2020

Good morning. Is anybody feeling lonely? Is anybody frustrated because you are stuck at home? If anybody a touch angry because you are stuck in your car with the windows up in the church parking lot only 10 feet away from people you love but you can't talk to them or touch them? I know you are. During this pandemic, loneliness is at epidemic proportions. I am sure more people are suffering from painful loneliness than are suffering from COVID-19.

Loneliness was at epidemic proportions before the pandemic started. One study I stumbled upon claimed 40 percent of Americans struggle with loneliness. Many studies claim that while social media relationships are up, actual face-to-face personal relationships are down. No wonder people feel lonely. We don't even know our neighbors like we once did. One study says that in the last 25 years, the number of neighbors we know has decreased 33 percent compared to our parents' generation. The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, but instead of loving them, we don't even know them. Instead of knowing our neighbors, we just describe them. We call one neighbor lawnmower guy, another neighbor is known as jogging guy, another neighbor is known as hunting guy because he wears camo and drives a truck on the weekends. We don't know our neighbors.

Another article I ran across claims the average American only has two close friends. There are 327 million people in our country, but if we have a bad day, there are only two people we can call on the phone. No wonder we are lonely.

Loneliness was a huge problem before social distancing. It is far worse with social distancing. The good news is today we are going to talk about how to have the kind of relationships God desires for his people. God wants us to have relationships that are deep and satisfying. Today, I will show you where to find them, how to experience them, and why Jesus must be at the center of them. This is a very practical sermon for this time.

Before we dive into the text, let's take a few minutes to explore the theological background of loneliness.

Sin creates loneliness.

Let's begin with the origins of loneliness. In the book of Genesis, after God created Adam, everything was good — except for one thing. It was not good for man to be alone. Adam was lonely. God created Eve. Eve was more than Adam's spouse. She was his best friend. She was his helpmate. Adam and Eve enjoyed working together in their common, God-given mission of tending the garden to bring glory to God. As they worked together on that mission, they grew closer to one another. They had joy in the work of bringing glory to God.

Everything changed when sin entered the world in Genesis 3. Sin brought a return to loneliness. It was a deeper loneliness than Adam and Eve had known. Sin separated Adam and Eve from God, which was terrible loneliness. Sin also separated Adam and Eve from one another and created trouble in their marriage. For the first time, Adam and Eve experienced loneliness in their relationship with God and loneliness from one another. Adam and Eve also experienced loneliness in another way. They were kicked out of the garden and the work of

tending the garden to bring glory to God. Outside of the garden their work was for themselves and to survive.

The first point we see is that sin creates loneliness. The good news is God sent Jesus to deal with the problem of sin, and the problem of loneliness that came about because of sin. Jesus came to restore our relationship with God. Jesus came to restore our relationship with one another. Jesus also came to give us back a common mission of working together for the glory of God in this world. We call this the mission of sharing the gospel. In summary, sin produces separation and loneliness from God, one another, and our mission of bringing God glory. Jesus came to take care of the problem of sin and loneliness. He restores us to God, to one another, and to the mission of bringing glory to God through our lives and through sharing the gospel.

With that theological background, let's transition to Philippians and get some background for this book.

Paul was lonely. He had a stay-at-home order.

Remember where Paul was when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. Two weeks ago, we learned he was under house arrest in the city of Rome. House arrest was a nice version of jail. Paul could be at a home, but he could not leave home. If you are going nuts being stuck at home for two months, imagine what it was like for Paul. According to Acts 28, he was under house arrest for two years. He didn't have any freedom. In addition, he was chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day.

At least we can go to Wal-Mart with a mask so all the hoarders can take all the toilet paper. At least we can go to the bank. Three months ago if a bunch of

people came to the bank wearing masks, people would have called the cops. Today, if you wear a mask in the bank, they will gladly give you money.

Paul couldn't do any of that. He couldn't leave the house. He couldn't take a drive around the lake. He couldn't go hang in a hammock in the woods. Paul understood loneliness. He knew what it was like to be stuck at home.

As we study the first 11 verses of this book, we will find what brought Paul joy in spite of his loneliness was the gospel partnership he had with the Philippians. Gospel partnerships are different than ordinary friendships. Friendship are based on proximity and affinity. Gospel partnerships have a deeper root. Gospel partnerships are Christians working together to share the good news of Jesus Christ in this world. They are based on a common experience of Jesus and a common mission from Jesus. That is why they are special. That is one reason they draw us together.

Before we look at gospel partnerships in Philippians, let's take a moment to talk about friendships so we can see why gospel partnerships are different. Most friendships are based on proximity and affinity.

If you look at your high school yearbook, you will see photos of people you once thought were your best friends. I am sure some of those people signed your yearbook with an encouraging sentences such as, "Best friends forever!" or "Best friends for life!" The problem is, after they signed your yearbook with those encouraging words, you haven't seen or heard from them for 20 years. You thought you had deep and lasting friendships with them in high school but they fell apart. That is because your friendships were based on proximity. You went to

school together. You were forced to spend time together. You became friends because you were near one another. Your friendships were more about living in the same town than actually having something in common. That is why friendships based on proximity often don't last.

Other friendships are based on **affinity**. Affinity means having something in common. Maybe you like video games, so your best friends are all gamers. Maybe you like motorcycles, so your best friends ride motorcycles. Your friend groups are really affinity group. The problem with affinity friendships is as soon as your affinity for something goes away, those friends go away. I know this will be hard for some of our young adults to believe, but one day you will realize video games take a lot of time. They are a poor use of your time. You will cut them out of your life. The problem is, when you cut video games out of your life, you will lose all the gamer friends you have in your life. They didn't really love you. They just wanted to play video games with you. This is why it is hard for proximity and affinity friendships to last.

This morning, Paul will introduce us to a different kind of relationship, a relationship that will not fade over time. It is a relationship that gets better over time. It is called a gospel partnership. Gospel partnerships begin with our common experience of Christ's and the Holy Spirit's presence in our hearts. God doesn't go away over time. In addition, God has given Christians the common mission of sharing the gospel. That mission is just as pressing on our lives when we are 17 as when we are 70. That is why gospel partnerships last when

friendships fade. Let's read about gospel partnerships and see what Paul taught us about them and the joy we can experience from them.

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:1–11 (ESV)

This passage divides into three parts. The first two verses are a brief introduction. In verses 3-8, Paul told the Philippians about the joy he had from them in spite of his loneliness. In verses 9 to 11, Paul told the Philippians how he prayed for them because he loved them. This morning, we will just focus on verses 3-8 and the joy Paul had in his relationship with the Philippians. This week, in your Life Groups, you will study verses 9-11 where we learn how Paul prayed for people he loved so we can learn how to pray for those we love. Let's dive into our study.

Gospel partnerships give us more joy because they are built on the common mission of sharing the gospel.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Philippians 1:3–5 (ESV)

As we have seen, Paul was not in comfortable circumstances. He was in jail. He was lonely. He faced the possibility of execution. He didn't have much happiness in his circumstances, yet he wrote about joy. Where did this joy come

from? The goal of Paul's life was to share the gospel and for people to come to maturity in the gospel. Paul had joy in his loneliness because the Philippians matured in their faith. Their faith was bearing fruit. They were not just Christians because of Paul. They were not just friends with Paul. They were partners in the spread of the gospel with Paul. This shows great spiritual maturity in the Philippians' lives, and when Paul saw that, it gave him joy!

As we learned in the first week of our study, in this short four-chapter book, Paul talked about joy 16 times. Every time he talked about joy, he was filled with joy because the gospel was spreading. People were coming to Christ. People were maturing and bearing fruit for Christ. That is what matters in life, so that is where he found his joy in life. At the end of the day, it didn't matter if Paul was suffering in prison. As long as the gospel was making progress and displaying fruit in the lives of believers, he was filled with joy.

Remember what occasioned this letter to the Philippians. This was a thank you note. When the Philippians heard that Paul was languishing in a Roman prison, they sent Paul a monetary gift through a man named Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus was likely a deacon in Philippian church. Epaphroditus didn't just deliver money to Paul but he was sent to stay with Paul in Rome while he was under house arrest to assist Paul as he shared the gospel in that prison and in that city. The Philippians were sending their money and personnel to Paul to help him share the gospel. Most churches didn't do this. The Philippians did this because their faith was maturing. They were more than friends. They were

gospel partners with Paul. The Philippians' faith was bearing fruit, and when Paul saw the fruit of the gospel in their lives, he was filled with joy.

Gospel partnerships are about mission, not just friendship.

What are a gospel partnerships? This word *partner* is important in this sentence. In Greek, this is the word *koinonia*. We usually translate that word as fellowship. *Koinonia* means much more than friendship while enjoying coffee and donuts. It is wrong for a church to talk about sending people of the church to a fellowship hall where they can enjoy the church potluck. *Koinonia* has gained more of a commercial overtone to it. *Koinonia* is actually a friendship focused around achieving a preferred vision of the future. For example, if two people bought a boat together, and they went into a fishing business together, they may be friends with one another, but that business partnership together would point them in a *koinonia* relationship together. They would be working together and sacrificing together, for the common vision of the business.

This is how a gospel partnership works. It is Christians not just being friends but working together and sacrificing together for the common vision of the progress of the gospel in their world. Just as Adam and Eve worked together for the glory of God in the garden, Christians are to be working together to spread the gospel in this world. When we work together for the mission of the gospel, there is great joy.

If you have traveled on a mission trip, you know the bond the team forms on the trip. On a mission trip, people are not just friends together but they work for a common goal of sharing the gospel. The bond experienced in a gospel

partnership is much deeper, richer, and more enjoyable than an ordinary friendship.

This is the way all of our relationships are to be around the church. We are not just saved together. We are not just Christian friends hanging out together. We are to be on mission together. We are to work together to share Jesus. It is when we work together and serve together for the cause of Christ in the church that our deepest and most satisfying relationships will be built.

Unfortunately, many people in the American church see themselves as customers to be served, rather than gospel partners who are called by God to work together on the common mission of reaching people for Jesus. This is the most important part of the message to remember. Christian friendships are good, but gospel partnerships are much better. It is when Christians work together for the common mission of sharing the gospel that their deepest and most satisfying relationships will be found. In a world filled with loneliness, that is something we don't want to miss.

Let me give you some examples. I realize not all of these are possible during social distancing, but use your memory. When people work together in AWANA, gospel partnerships happen and great relationships are built. When the worship team works together, gospel partnerships happen and great relationships are built. When youth leaders work together, gospel partnerships are built. Great joy is found when Christians work together for the cause of Christ in this world.

Let's see what else we can learn about gospel partnerships.

The longer gospel partnerships last, the more joy they bring.

...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.
Philippians 1:5 (ESV)

The Philippians were gospel partners with Paul for a long time. They prayed for him, helped him financially, and sent people like Epaphroditus to assist him more than once. Later in Philippians, Paul reminded them of his gratitude because they helped him multiple times in Thessalonica. After leaving Philippi, the next city Paul evangelized in Acts was Thessalonica. Right after the birth of the church in Philippi there was a desire to help Paul share the gospel. They helped him financially in Thessalonica and likely helped him practically with people like Epaphroditus. They partnered with Paul in sharing the gospel many times. The time between the beginning of the church in Philippi and Paul's incarceration in a Roman prison was 10 years. This means the Philippians were faithful gospel partners with Paul for a long time. The longer a gospel partnership lasts and more faithful a gospel partnership is, the more joy a gospel partnership brings.

Can you imagine the joy Paul felt when Epaphroditus showed up with money and a commitment to help Paul share the gospel while he was under house arrest? Can you imagine the gratitude in Paul's heart for the long-term faithfulness of the Philippians when other churches had forgotten him?

There is application here for us. Some people are like frogs. They church hop. Let me put in a plug in for long-term church partnerships. I realize God sometimes calls people out of one church to another church. Sometimes people change churches because they are looking for something new. When that

happens, they break the gospel partnerships that had and deny themselves much of the joy that could be theirs from long-term gospel partnerships that faithfully work to share the gospel. Church hoppers miss out on gospel partnership joy.

Gospel partnerships are evidence of authentic spiritual life.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

Paul was confident God would complete the good work of salvation he began in the Philippians' lives. This is a great memory verse. It is a reminder that our salvation is all God's good work from first to last. We saw this in the birth of the church of Philippi. It was God who opened Lydia's heart to become a Christian in Acts 16. God would be faithful and complete the work of salvation he began in Lydia's life because God started it in her life. God is the one who opened your heart and my heart to understand the gospel message. God will be faithful and complete the work of salvation he began in our lives. There is nothing wrong with that truth. We want to hold on to that truth.

In context, this verse means more than God begins and completes salvation in our lives. Remember what Paul was talking about. He was talking about gospel partnerships. The Philippians' long-term partnership with Paul for the gospel was solid evidence that God was genuinely at work in their lives. Paul saw long-term gospel partnerships as evidence for the authenticity of someone's salvation.

Sometimes we feel unsure about our salvation. Is God really at work in our lives? How can we know God is at work in us? Paul said, "Look at your gospel

partnerships. Long-term commitment to working with others to sacrifice for the gospel . To share the gospel is evidence for the authenticity of God’s work in your life.”

God gives gospel partners great love for one another.

It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace... For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:7–8 (ESV)

This is the jewel on which this message is built. The gospel partnership Paul had with the Philippians gave him great love for them in his heart. Paul clearly said, “I hold you in my heart.” The ESV reads a little awkwardly but Paul was literally saying, “I love you guys with all of my heart.” He loved them so much because as Paul and the Philippians worked to share the gospel, God gave them a special love for one another. God drew them together. In verse 8, Paul circled back to the love he had for them because of his gospel partnership with them. He said, “I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ.” That is a strong statement of his affection. He loved them like Jesus loved them. That is a lot of love! That is deep love! That is the kind of love that doesn’t come out of a Christian friendship. It only comes from a gospel partnership.

When we work with our fellow Christians to help share the gospel, God will birth in our hearts a deep love for our gospel partners. The people you find yourself loving most deeply in this world are those that you have partnered with for the gospel in this world. It always works that way.

Recently, Katie, who is one of our missionaries, became engaged. She is engaged to man she met while serving on the mission field. They found their

common love of serving Jesus drew them together. Partnering for the gospel drew them together and gave them love for one another.

Young adults, one of the best ways to meet the right person is to get involved serving in the church and working for the gospel in the church. When you are doing that, simply look who is serving next to you. Who are the gospel partners God has given you? Expect God will give you a special love for one another and joy as you serve together.

Let me speak to married couples. One of the best things a couple can do to improve their marriage is to serve together in the church as gospel partners. This is the same principle in action. Serving Christ together draws you together. God takes gospel partners and weaves their hearts together. He gives them a deep love for one another that comes from the common experience of Christ and the common mission of sharing Christ. How does this look practically? If you are a married couple, work together in the youth ministry or in the AWANA ministry or on the mission team. You will find yourself having deeper love for one another and drawing closer to one another. This love comes from God, not from us.

The more adversity gospel partnerships face, the more joy they bring.

...for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:7–8 (ESV)

Another reason the Philippians held such a special place in Paul's heart was because of the faithfulness of their gospel partnership. They were helping him share the gospel on his good days and on his bad days. When Paul talked about defending and confirming the gospel, those are legal terms. Paul was referring to times he made formal, public, and legal presentations of the gospel in

a court of law. We see one of those times in Acts 26. Paul made a defense of the gospel before King Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus in Caesarea in a notable, public way. These were important people. At those times, Paul was like a rock star. He was a Christian celebrity. Everybody wanted to be able to say they supported Paul as one of their missionaries.

Two chapters later, in Acts 28, Paul was under house arrest. That chapter tells us that initially large numbers of Jews came to hear Paul. Paul was still a Christian rock star and a fun missionary to partner with for the gospel.

Later in that chapter, it tells us Paul's popularity while under house arrest diminished. People stopped coming to him. People avoided him. People forgot about him. At that point, it would have been easy for people to forget about him, for people to stop supporting him. The Philippians didn't do that. They were faithful. In the ups and downs of his ministry, they continued partnering with him to share the gospel on his good days and his tough days. That made their gospel partnership especially sweet in Paul's heart.

Good gospel partners are like that. They are not fair weather friends. They are faithful friends. That is another reason their gospel partnership is so special.

A little later in Philippians, Paul talked about sending Timothy to the Philippians to help them share the gospel, just as the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to help him. Look how Paul described Timothy — Paul loved Timothy so dearly. It was because of Timothy's faithfulness in the hard times not just the good times.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely

concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. Philippians 2:19–22 (ESV)

Paul said Timothy was like a son to a father; he was always there on the hard days as well as the good days. That made Timothy's gospel partnership with Paul especially sweet and filled it with joy.

How can I move from Christian friendships to gospel partnerships?

Become a Christian, join a church, and sink yourself into serving.

Gospel partnerships begin with Jesus. You need to have the common experience of Jesus in your heart. Gospel partnerships are about Christians working together. That is the purpose for the church. Gospel partnerships are moving beyond friendships in the church to serving Christ together in the church, to working together to share the gospel in this world. Churches were never designed to be places where we are members of an audience. Everyone is a member of the team. We roll up our sleeves and use our gifts for the kingdom. God has given each of us different practical gifts and spiritual gifts. He has given them to us to work together for the gospel in the church. Just as Adam and Eve had great joy when they were working together for God's glory in the garden, we will experience great joy when we work together for God's glory in the church. The best relationships we will experience in this world are the ones we make when we are working together for the gospel on the same team.

Serve in the church faithfully.

Remember, the longer gospel partnerships last and the more faithful we are in them, the sweeter and more satisfying they become. Don't short-change yourself in joy. Partner together and serve together for the long haul.

Partner in gospel work with your spouse. Your love for one another will grow.

Earlier, we learned how working for the cause of Christ together draws people closer and gives them joy. Remember, one of the best ways for a husband and wife to draw together is for them to work together serving Christ.

Take a mission trip to experience the joy of gospel partnerships firsthand.

While we cannot take a mission trip with the coronavirus happening, the pandemic will be over at some point. When it is, make sure you take a mission trip so you can experience gospel partnership firsthand. Recently, many in our church when on a mission trip to Haiti together. All of them will tell you about the special joy God gave them on that trip as they served him. They will also tell you of a special love God gave them for one another as they were on the trip. Take a mission trip and experience gospel partnership firsthand.

Support missionaries or local ministries financially, prayerfully, and practically.

We have a number of missionaries we support as a church. We are gospel partners with them. Take the time to get to know them. Build a relationship with them and go out of your way to help them. There is great joy in partnering with our missionaries, much more joy than you would expect.

CrossWinds is a multisite church because we are gospel partners that want more joy.

One of the reasons CrossWinds is a multisite church is because partnering with our extension site in Windom and our other campus in Spencer

gives us great joy. There is far more joy being a multisite church than being a single campus. We love partnering together for the gospel.

Conclusion

In a world that is battling loneliness and isolation, Paul introduced us to a new kind of relationship, a relationship that is far more satisfying than Christian friendships — gospel partnerships. Christians who sacrifice together and work together for the sharing of the gospel experience the closest and most joy-filled relationships in this world. God gives them a special love for one another and draws them together as they work for the progress of the gospel.

My friends, I don't want you to be lonely in this world. Make a decision to move beyond Christians friends. Join with your brothers and sisters in working together to share the gospel in our community. You will have great joy in place of loneliness; you will be glad you did.



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