

## Group Study Outline

### *Launching*

If you were to write a letter to Emmanuel, what would you be thanking God for? And what would you pray for?

### *Questions*

Read Acts 16:11-40.

What kind of people was Paul writing to?

How does he describe them in Phils 1:1? why?

Read Phils 1:1-8.

What does Paul thank God for?

In what ways have the Philippians been partners in the gospel?

Read Phils 4:14-18.

What particular thing have they done for Paul?

Why is this significant to Paul?

Why is it 'partnership in the gospel'?

Would Paul describe me as a partner in the gospel?

What marks are there in my life? what about my bank balance?

In what other ways can we demonstrate support for the gospeller?

Why does Paul thank God (3) rather than the Philippians?

What has God done, according to 1:3-8?

What will God do? what is this 'good work'? why does Paul write 1:6?

How should the day when Jesus returns affect what I do now?

Does it? am I future-focussed?

Read Phils 1:9-11.

What is Paul's perspective (ie his future horizon) in this prayer?

What must happen between now and then if Christians are to be pure and blameless when Jesus returns?

What does Paul mean by 'what is best'? what is 'best' for Christians?

Take some time thinking this through ... what is Paul praying against?

Are there areas where I've become complacent/sloppy as a Christian?

Is the pursuit of excellence ever wrong?

What percentage of my prayers is for things of eternal value?

Do I think my prayers should change? Why/why not?

### *Conclusion*

Compare the list you wrote at the start with what Paul wrote.

## Philippians 1:1-11

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### Theme Sentence

Paul, thankful for the Philippians' gospel partnership, longs that they continue in that gospel-centeredness until Jesus returns.

### Story Board

What a mixed bag of saints you are! Yet you continue to come together, all of you, to show a single-minded partnership in the gospel: you have given money generously to support my gospel work. And I'm so grateful.

Generosity towards the person who brought you the gospel is good evidence that you've embraced the gospel they brought. And that's why I can be confident as I look to the future. Since God has so obviously been at work in you to bring you to the point of conversion, he'll definitely complete the job and get you to heaven.

So now my prayer for you is that you develop in this gospel-centeredness to live for what is best, that is, to live a thoroughly godly life now because your attention is firmly fixed on the day when Jesus returns.

### Application

- There is an unbreakable link between embracing the gospel and supporting the gospeller. If I am a Christian, then someone should be able to tell by looking at (eg) my bank statements! On the other hand, if I'm not supporting gospel ministry, then people would be right to question how converted I am.
- The day when Jesus returns ought to fill my horizon and radically affect how I live. In particular, my prayers ought to focus on praying for things of eternal value. Do they?
- Paul is concerned that Christians don't become static, and thereby complacent. We should long for, and pray for, the 'best' things so that we live godly lives that mean we're ready for Jesus' return.

## Verse by verse

1-2 *Saints* is a NT word for all Christians (not 'special Christians', as we tend to use the word). We know from Acts 16:11-40 that this church included a prosperous business woman, a fortune-telling slave girl and a prison governor: a varied bunch whom God turned in *holy ones* (lit) *in Christ Jesus*. What we hold in common in the gospel is greater than what makes us different.

3-8 It is not immediately obvious why Paul is so thankful to God for these Christians. The important thing is to link these verses with 4:14-19 where Paul re-uses words and phrases in a way that suggests he's returning at the end of the letter to the same subject. For example, the Greek word *koinonia* (which is the normal NT word for 'fellowship') is used in 1:5 (*partnership*), in 1:7 (partakers/*share in*) and in 4:15 (*partnership/shared with*). It's clear in 4:15-18 that Epaphroditus has delivered a gift of financial support, which *all* (repeated in 1:1, 4, 7a, 7b, 8, etc) have been part of (2 Cor 8:2 is also about this church and this gift). Paul is making a big deal of this gift because it demonstrates genuine commitment to the gospel (as well as personal support for him). Why does he think it demonstrates this?

The logic here is that this *partnership* is the evidence God has begun his good work in the Philippians: if someone is generous with the collection plate, then that's a good indication they've been changed by the generous gospel. In Mark 6:8-11, Jesus tells his disciples that they won't need bread, bag or money because they'll be looked after in villages where people receive their message ... and this is just what had happened in Philippi. Lydia embraces the gospel and asks (in Acts 16:15) 'how can I support it?' And, in Acts 16:33-34, the jailer does the same.

6 There are clues here about what Paul thinks the gospel is. He thanks God for the Philippians and their partnership because it is what God has done in them that has changed them. But the sense here is of a job not yet complete. The gospel has not finished with me until *the day of Christ* (6, 10). But I can have confidence about this future: if God's plan is to get me fit for heaven, he's not going to give up on me before he's got me there (cf Romans 8:28-30). Philippians is full of 'pressing on' language (eg 3:11-14): it's a theme we'll keep coming back to.

7 Paul is in prison as he writes (cf 1:13), probably awaiting trial (since *defending/confirming* are legal terms for presenting a defence).

9-11 Paul's emotional language (*feel* [7], *affection* [8]) suggest his burden or heartache. He feels great joy over them but it's not complete (2:2), there are some threats to their being of one spirit (chs 2 and 4), and from false teachers (ch 3): his ministry with them can't be over yet. And because it can't be, he yearns and prays, and tells them what he yearns and prays for as a way to encourage them directly.

Don Carson (in A Call to Spiritual Reformation, ch 8) very helpfully suggests that Paul's prayer here is concerned with ...

### **what is excellent (9-10a)**

Paul is praying against complacency: don't stay the same as a Christian. So he prays that these Christians pursue Christian excellence, setting their course for *what is best/excellent* in terms of (eg) how they spend their time, what they read, their family relationships, personal prayer, how they spend their money, living a life of self-denial out of the comfort-zone, etc. These things are the *fruit* that comes from God having made us righteous (3:9). But there is a process to this: we will not know what is this *best* without a personal *knowledge* of God's character, combined with fully-developed practical *discernment* to know what pleases him in every situation. The *best* can be measured by abounding *love* (and Paul will go to explain that Jesus' love should shape their behaviour [2:14; 4:2-4]).

### **the long view (10b-11a)**

Paul's concern is for *pure* and *blameless* behaviour. And one way to be clearer about this *best* is if our perspective is set to *the day of Christ*. But it's not 'behave well now or you'll get judged' but 'behave superbly well now because you are utterly constrained by that coming day and are living in anticipation of it'. What will matter then is what really matters.

### **God's glory rather and idolatry (11b)**

The danger with emphasising *what is best* is that we become perfectionists, pursuing excellence to the point of idolatry. 9-10a won't excuse laziness, sloppiness or lack of discipline, but concern for *the glory and praise of God* won't allow us to divide high-achieving from *the fruit of righteousness*. Living right matters far more now (and then) than serving our own ego.