

**Partnership**  
Serve Strong Series Week 3  
Philippians 1:3-7  
May 13, 2018

Welcome/intro/vision

FIRST: Happy Mother's Day! Moms, hope today is a rich day, full of you being celebrated and thanked for the hard work you do. Thank you!

We've got a small gift on the way out for mom's, whether you're a mom by biology or simply someone who has invested in others, we invite you to take one.

And for those of you for whom this is a hard day, praying for you this week: maybe you didn't have kids yourself and that was hard

Maybe your relationship with your mom is strained in some way or maybe she passed away recently—again, praying for you that you know the comfort and presence of God in the midst of your grief—the one who walks with us and redeems even the hardest seasons or areas of our lives

This is our last week of this short series called "Serve Strong" we're talking about how with the exception of a few of us, most of us have a conflicted relationship with serving

We maybe know we should do it, but it's seldom convenient or easy, it usually costs us something like time or energy, both valuable resources

And then if we're church or Jesus people, we have the added layer of it seems like the Bible and Jesus especially talks a ton about serving

And sometimes if you hang out in religious circles that gets leveraged to move people out of guilt or obligation or duty to suck it up and serve, even if you don't want to

The goal of this series has been that we might all get our hearts and minds around a deeper, stronger motivation that would free us to live lives that serve

Not out of guilt or obligation, but joy.

In fact, last week we looked at a passage where we saw that part of God's goal for our lives when we follow after Jesus is that we might LEARN contentedness—we have to LEARN contentedness because it doesn't come naturally to hardly any of us

So Jesus wants us to LEARN contentedness and he wants that in part because when we're living DISCONTENTED lives, we end up self-consumed and self-absorbed

When we have a deep well of contentedness at the center of our lives, we're free to SERVE OTHERS, with our eyes up and out rather than inward and downward

Ultimately, Jesus calls all of us to live lives that are marked by serving and a servant's hearts—a servant-hearted posture that is full of joy and deep contentment, just like his was

And so we're doing some work on this over these couple of weeks and then we're going to implement it and exercise it with Chatham Serves next Sunday

And we invite you and your families to sign up, find a spot, and serve together alongside the people sitting around you  
which has been one of the surprising benefits for me over the years with Chatham Serves

One of the things I personally appreciate about Chatham Serves is how I've gotten to know a different side of some of you as we've rolled up our sleeves and gone to work serving together

There are two major pieces of angst in our culture that God in his mercy wants to deliver us from: self-absorption and isolation  
they suffocate our souls and destroy our spirits

And what we find is that all of us from time to time slip into those lifeless places, don't we?  
we wake up one morning and realize that nobody really knows us  
or we wake up one morning and realize that all the unhealthy signs of a self-absorbed life are staring us right in the face, in particular there's a trail of disappointed and hurt people behind you, some of them were supposed to be the people you were supposed to love the most but you couldn't

And God in his mercy wants to deliver you and me from the curse of isolation and self-absorption, and what we find is that he's done this by making room to give us REAL work to do and then calling us to do it together.

That's the gift we're going to find as we turn to Philippians 1: Bible/no Bible/new to the Bible:

***<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.***

If you've been in and out the past few weeks, might have missed some big news

If you felt a disturbance in the force back on April 30<sup>th</sup>, it's because we paid off the 10.5 acres down the road on Andrews Store Road that will one day be the location of our new church building

If you're brand new, purchased some property that we thought was going to take us about 2 years to pay off but due to the incredible generosity of so many people here we paid it off in 13 months!

And we're so grateful to everyone for your prayers and participation in this whole thing that last week we passed out little vials of the actual land from the property to celebrate that it's ours

And we ask you to put it somewhere where you'll remember to pray for this process as we move from land purchase to getting ready for construction, more information on that will be coming by the end of the summer.

So if you didn't get one of these last week, please pick one up and thank you!

Well we have a great team of folks who love to pray here at Chatham Community Church and several weeks ago as it became clear that the land would be paid off by the end of April, I invited the prayer team to join me on a prayer walk over the land, to seal it, celebrate this milestone, and to dedicate the land to the work of God going forward

So last Sunday, a couple of us met up at the land and we had a wonderful time praying together over the property.

We started by sharing a little bit of our heart for what we wanted to see God eventually do on that land

One person shared how she wanted it to be a place of healing for broken and hurting people, maybe especially for people who have been broken or hurt by the church in the past—a wonderful vision for a church

Another person shared how they wanted it to be a place with doors wide open to the community, literally or metaphorically or both. That it would be a place where all kinds of people gathered for all sorts of reasons and served as a hub for community and grace

We were standing in a spot that I think is likely to be the parking lot. I shared that I wanted God to meet people right there in the parking lot—especially new people.

When you're new, you pull into the parking lot and the nerves kick in at a new level—do you remember that? You get a little more nervous, a little more uncertain. Some people pull into the parking lot, freak out, and pull right back out!

So I shared that I wanted God to be at work right there in the parking lot on the way in, that he would quiet people's nerves or defensiveness and give them his surprising peace

AND THEN I shared that on the way out I prayed that the conversations back in that car would be full of joy, laughter, gratitude, rich conversations sharing how God met them maybe in surprising ways

So we all shared our hearts for what we were praying and hoping would eventually happen on this land

And then we spread out across the land for about 30 minutes and just prayed. And at the end we re-gathered together, shared the things that God had put on our hearts as we had walked and prayed, and then we closed

And as I pulled away, I found myself smiling. I was so incredibly grateful for the hour of partnership and friendship I had just shared with these wonderful, prayer-full people.

This is something of what's happening as Paul writes this letter to his friends the Philippians. This is a church that prays about with JOY! Why? ***Because of their partnership in the gospel...and their sharing together in God's grace***

This little church has been in it with Paul.

They've prayed together, they've supported and encouraged each other, the Philippians have given to Paul's ministry in generous financial ways, they've served together

As they've partnered together in and around a mission that matters for all eternity—the GOSPEL—and the importance of the mission is part of the joy

The gospel is the good news that God made us in his image to love and serve him and each other and to help this world to flourish and become more beautiful and more alive

But we turned away from God and the result has been train wreck and disaster at every turn when we cut ourselves off from the source of life, it turns out that we can't be the instruments of life to each other the way that God designed us to be

But the gospel is the good news that into this mess, God puts on flesh to come to get us. Jesus is God's answer to the broken relationships that mar human existence

He lives a perfect life and then dies a sacrificial death on our behalf that we might be forgiven and our relationship with God reconciled

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, he's raised again from the dead into new life, and he offers eternal life to all who will trust in him

It's both a reconciled relationship with God *and an invitation to once again take up our place in his kingdom as people made in God's image who go to work making this world more beautiful, causing it to flourish and come alive.*

This is the substance of what Paul's partnership is built on with the Philippians and it not only matters, it matters eternally

And that partnership has forged a tremendous relationship that is joy-giving and life-giving.

Now here's the thing, we all know that not every partnership is joy-giving and life-giving. We've all had group projects that were miserable, right?

SG this past week: every college project a group of 4: 1 leader, 2 willing followers, 1 slacker!

Some of you were the slackers, there were some not-so-pretty things said about your people in my small group this past week!

In every organization, every situation there are two levels of dynamics happening: there's the opportunities or problems or tasks that are in front of us AND THEN there's the PERSONALITIES and the PEOPLE AROUND the tasks or problems

And very often the harder part in the process is the personalities and people, not the tasks themselves—this is why relational and emotional intelligence is a better indicator of success than mere IQ in just about any context, including business.

But this partnership between Paul and Philippians has been JOYFUL for Paul and the Philippians--and we want work together HERE to sound like that, to look like that

So let's talk about what makes for **great partnerships in the gospel**—some of these describe great partnerships in GENERAL, some are unique to what it means for us to be partnering in the gospel

Great partnerships in the gospel tend to:

- **Operate in and continue to cultivate high levels of TRUST and appreciation for all the people involved in the work**
- **Have a clear life-giving Kingdom of God impact (even if it's not quantifiably measurable)**
- **Is encouraging for those who participate AND for those who are on the receiving end (servants and those being served are all blessed)**
- **Stretch us to new levels of faith in what God is capable of doing**
- **Teach us the value healthy mutual interdependence--both the discovery of our own gifts and appreciation of the gifts of others: NOT COMPETITIVE, not threatened**

And, of course, **not-so-great partnerships do the opposite of the above:**

- **Trust gets drained, people feel used OR demand the spotlight**
- **Little or no kingdom impact**
- **Only those being served OR only those serving experience the blessing**
- **Don't stretch our faith in any way**
- **Don't reveal our own gifts or teach us to appreciate the gifts of others**

So you've probably experienced a not-so-great partnership, right?

Take the faith element away, you've been in a place where you felt unappreciated, trust drained, no real cooperation between different people with different gifts

You've been a part of a work that didn't really make any sort of difference

There's not much joy there, is there?

But if and when we can have great partnerships in the gospel that look something like this, do you know what happens to our isolation and our self-absorption? They evaporate and are replaced with JOY!

Now in every partnership there's more than just you, it takes two or more to form a partnership, so we have limited control over how much of the joy-giving good partnerships we can have

BUT I want to suggest to you that in most every partnership you have in your life, you have SOME power and SOME ability to help create the joyful partnership rather than the empty one

And so this morning as we're learning what it means to cultivate servant's hearts, I want to ask you this question:

***How might the gospel compel you to help shape joyful, life-giving partnerships in every place where God sends you?***

For those of us who have experienced the love and power of Jesus, we're sent into a broken world, just like he was, to help it come more alive

We're called to help shape great partnerships, this is a great gift you could bring to ANY organization or situation—your business, your volunteer work or with your extended family

If just the Christians all across Chatham County were utterly committed to bringing in the grace and power of Jesus to help create joyful and life-giving partnerships to every school, every volunteer organization, every neighborhood, every challenge we need to tackle as a community, it would change everything, wouldn't it?

Second pass at this:

***How might you help us have joyful partnerships in the gospel as a church?***

Whether it's Chatham Serves next week or how you volunteer on Sunday Crew or Chatham Kids or the Welcome Team or as a part of your small group—there are opportunities for joyful partnerships and/or frustrating ones

How might you help us here as a church to be a place of joyful partnerships in the gospel?

What's happening here is life changing for all of us, as we serve, as we serve and bless others, all sides.

What can you do to help shape joyful, life-giving partnerships in every place God sends you, including here at the church?

Because part of the message of the gospel is that what God does in his forgiveness and redemption of us as his people is call us to take up our rightful place in his kingdom as people made in his image to make a difference here in this place

There's this tension that gets mapped out throughout the New Testament of God who's always working, Jesus who's always around us and for us, the God who's got all things under his control

AND this genuine invitation to step in participate because what we do or don't do matters

God is in control, what we do matters, the New Testament claims that both of these things are true and you see the tension right here in the passage we're looking at:

***In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.***

Okay, so Paul's confident that God's at work in the Philippians and he's confident that God himself will FINISH that work

And we can assume that Paul would say the same thing about not just the Philippians but all that God started

On Easter Sunday, God started this domino effect of grace that's being unleashed all over the place

Paul's confident that the same God who raised Jesus from the dead will continue to work out his purposes and his plans in the world

So if that's true, why isn't Paul just sitting back and drinking margaritas all day every day? God's totally got this, right?

But instead of margaritas all day every day, Paul's hustling

working SO incredibly hard, every day, going to jail for this gospel, and inviting other people to join him in suffering for the advancement of this work

He declares that God is in control but he's working like what he does really matters—so which is it?

Well, it's this: God IS in control, AND what we do matters—it's both.

The fact that God got there first gives us confidence that our work is not in vain. He's been at work long before we got there, he'll continue to be at work long after we're gone.

The reality is, if we WEREN'T confident that God was going to take our work and weave it in with his, THEN we should all just slack off.

All of our efforts would be just a grain of sand into a bottomless pit of needs.

But because God's at work, we're confident that we can go to work too, knowing that he'll take our work and multiply it and graft our efforts in with his that will bear fruit into eternity.

He who began a good work in you and around you WILL BE faithful to complete it, one day everything will be made new, right and well

And he invites YOU to join in the party. He invites YOU to share in his inevitably victorious and glorious work.

The Jesus story is that God has made you in his image and then redeemed and rescued you in part so that you might exercise your image-bearing-ness in life-giving ways

God makes you in his image and then he makes room for you to make a real difference in the world that he really, really loves and that he calls you and I to love as he does

We live in a world full of problems, gaps, and pain—from human trafficking to addictions to the conflicts that are all up and down your family or your neighborhood or your workplace  
it's not as bad as it could be, but none of it is as good and beautiful as it was meant to be

I want to suggest to you that 99% of human-made problems could be described as people made in God's image not doing image-bearing work.

God made us in his image to love and serve each other, love and serve him, and to make this world to flourish and come more and more alive

When image bearers DON'T do image-bearing work, there are consequences

It's like parenting: you can be a parent in name-only but not really parent your kids. You are a parent by virtue of biology, but you're only really a parent by virtue of embracing the call on your life that parenting demands of you

And if you don't parent your kids, there are real consequences to those kids

Take that principle and apply it across the board: we're all image-bearers but some of us are image-bearers in name only and have not yet embraced that as a passion and profession and lifestyle

And if we remain image-bearers in name only and do not embrace the opportunities and responsibilities inherent in that title, then there are real consequences to this world

Like a parent who neglects parenting, image-bearers who don't actually image-bear leave a real void and very often do serious damage to the world around them

When we first put Jesus at the center of our lives, we are restored fully into the title of image-bearer that was ours in the beginning

But when we embrace the work of image-bearing through SERVING, we're not only accepting the title but living it out in ways that God made us to

When we serve—give our time and energies and employ our abilities and gifts to make this world more beautiful, healthier, and holier

Then we're actually doing the image-bearing that we were made for—it looks differently for each of us, but the core driver of serving God through making this world and the people in it come more alive is the same

When we DO NOT do this, we are BOTH undermining our own development and maturity as a fully alive human being

AND we're also leaving an us-shaped gap in the universe. And when and if enough of us do not take up our roles as people made in God's image, those gaps start to add up and up and up and up—and I want to suggest to you that's 99% of human problems here in this world

And so my friends, I want to call us to press through lesser names and lesser titles that this world wants to give to you

You're more than a consumer. You're more than an employee. You're more than retired. You're more than an assortment of demographic information like age and tax bracket and geography

You are a person made in God's image. God has come to restore that image in you, to put you back into the position that you were originally made to occupy

And then he calls you and I to go and DO that image-bearing thing he made you to do: to serve. To love. To bring all your days and your gifts and abilities to bear to make this world come more alive

There is no room in the Jesus-way for bystanders. There is no room for hoping someone else does it so you don't have to.

There IS room for rest and play, certainly—that's important! And There is lots of room for wise boundaries and realizing that we all have limits, not every problem is ours to tackle or to solve, we're all limited and that's fantastic and super-important to embrace

But only you can bring what God gifted you with and only you can make the difference that he prepared in advance for you to make

There is real risk involved, real pain involved, real love involved, but ultimately the very real hope—that as Paul says here, the God who began a good work will be faithful to complete it

You can know that any image-bearing work you do in the Lord will not be in vain

everything that we do in his name in submission to God's Spirit will be gathered up, and will be a part of his kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven

Whether it's prayer or fixing a roof or packing food for hungry people or making our local schools more beautiful

every good work done in his name will be gathered up, remembered by God

And every good work done in faith, hope, and love will run like a thread from the day that it's done to the end of time

in order to contribute to the final and ultimate beauty of all things that will be made new.

That's the great hope of Christ for you mom's on Mother's day, for all the ways that you've served!

So much of motherhood is thankless and not remembered—the good news in Christ is that God sees, God knows, and all your efforts and labors to love and serve your kids will be gathered up and integrated into the beauty and hope of all things

AND it's the great hope for our church community next week as we roll up our sleeves and jump in with Chatham Serves

in the past decade or so of doing Chatham Serves, we've poured out over 10,000 hours of good into our community

all of those threads are running right now in real time from the moment those acts of faithful service were completed and they will continue to run into eternity where they'll be a part of God's great new making he's doing

God, in his grace and mercy, designs a universe where he remains in control AND what we do matters, how we treat each other matters

our faithful service is gathered up and incorporated and woven into the ultimate beauty and perfection that will one day describe and define this place

And as powerful as those threads of service are when we do them individually, they are all the more powerful when we do them together.

When our partnership in the gospel is operating in a healthy way, there is a joy to it, just like Paul said.

Gathering this all together today's **TAKE-WITH**

***What does it mean for you in this season to embrace image-bearing through joyful partnerships built around serving?***

This is not a one-time event, this is an identity shift, a totally new way of thinking about who you are and why you're here on this earth

But events can serve as an on-ramp to engaging with this calling on our lives, which is a big part of why we do **Chatham Serves**.

And so while we're working on this whole heart posture of re-framing our whole identity and whole understanding of purpose around serving God and serving others

We want to invite you to test-drive that identity and step into that identity by jumping in with a project next Sunday

Sign-ups are on-line live and in the lobby on the way out, this is an invitation to do what we were put here on earth to do.