



Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Philippians 1.1-11 | July 15, 2018

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we take a one-week break from our summer study of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter so that I can bring a special message on my last day at Good Shepherd. This passage from Philippians wonderfully captures how I feel about this church community, and articulates well my prayers for you and your future.

II. Connecting with One Another

When was the last time you received a note or card of appreciation? Who sent it to you? Why? How did it make you feel?

III. Study the Text

- a. Context: Philippi was the first place in Europe to hear the gospel message. (This is recounted in Acts 16.) As a city, it had been re-founded by Octavian as a Roman military colony after an important battle was won there in 42 BCE. The city and surrounding area was inhabited by many active and retired soldiers. The "Imperial Cult" had also been established in Philippi, that is, the worship of Caesar, the emperor, as savior and lord.

This letter was written sometime after the church was up and running, while Paul was in prison, most likely in Ephesus, perhaps as early as the mid-50's AD.

When people were put in prison in Paul's world, they were not normally provided food by their captors; they had to rely on friends helping them. The Philippian Christians sent Paul a gift of money to provide for his needs. One of his reasons for writing is to say a heartfelt "Thank you."

- b. Read Philippians 1.1-11. In this opening of this letter, what convictions does Paul express?
- c. Why did the Philippians bring Paul joy?
- d. This is a letter about *partnership* (v. 5), one of the most important words in Paul's vocabulary. It is sometimes translated *fellowship*, but it clearly has a practical, even financial, implication which our word *fellowship* doesn't always carry. Although fellowship conveys particular Christian meanings, including the delighted sharing of worship, prayer, and mutual support and friendship, in Paul's world it was the normal word for a business partnership.

In this partnership all those involved would share in both doing the work and providing for one another financially.

Consider Good Shepherd and your involvement. Would you say that you are in partnership for the gospel, or is your fellowship more social? Why do you answer as you do?

- e. Paul's confidence in this letter is that God is not just a beginner, but also a finisher (v. 6). The particular work God has begun—and will finish—is the work of grace, through the gospel, in the hearts and lives of the Philippian Christians.

How is it easy or difficult for you to trust God to complete the work he has started in you or in others? Why?

- f. Paul prays that the Philippians' love will overflow in knowledge and wisdom (v. 9). How does this idea contrast with more popular ideas of love?
- g. Paul also prays that this wise love will result in moral discernment (v. 10). Why is moral discernment a necessary component of Christian love?
- h. Finally, Paul prays that the Philippians may be filled to overflowing with the fruit of right living (v. 11). The word for *right living* is often translated *righteousness*. Here it emphasizes the behavior which results from both God's faithfulness and the status of being forgiven family members.

What are some of the fruits of right living?

- i. Paul mentions the return of Jesus twice (v. 6: "the day of Christ Jesus," and v. 10: "the day of Christ.") How does understanding God as a "finisher" help us to be patient with ourselves and others as we await that "day?"

#### IV. Reflect

- a. What are some of the ways you have seen God's "good work" (v. 6) begun and carried on at Good Shepherd? What are signs you see even now that God is at work?

#### V. Pray

The apostle Paul's prayer for the Philippians is a prayer that anyone in church leadership might wish to use for the people in their care. It is also a prayer that every Christian might use for friends or family members, or even themselves.

For yourself and for others, pray that all will have:

- love which overflows in knowledge and wisdom
- the ability to discern right from wrong
- and the fruit of right living to the glory of God

And let us, as (almost former) pastor and congregation, commit to praying for one another. God bless you, friends!