

- I. My Notes ... WWC message 4/11
- II. Series: Koinonia — The Joy of Living in Unity with Christ
 - Title: What it Means to be a Partner
 - Text: Philippians 1:1-11
 - Quote: “Joy is not a requirement of Christian discipleship; it is a consequence.” Eugene Peterson (Pastor, Author)
- III. Introduction
 - Most of us are not Greek Scholars (I know, one of those “duh” statements). There is a word that was frequently used back in the 70’s and 80’s when referring to Christian fellowship or gatherings ... Koiknonia (Greek). The literal translation is “fellowship.” The emphasis (context) is shared life, mutual support, the intimate bond that unites believers in faith. Now that I have the Greek lesson out of the way, let’s get to the reason this is coming up at this moment.
 - Koinonia is not just fellowship — it’s participation.
 - Participation in Christ’s life.
 - Participation in Christ’s mission.
 - Participation in Christ’s sufferings.
 - Participation in Christ’s joy.
 - There’s a kind of joy most people never experience. Not the joy that comes from a good week, a good paycheck, or a good moment — those are fragile joys, easily shaken. I’m talking about a joy that can survive disappointment, endure suffering, and even grow in the middle of uncertainty. A joy that doesn’t depend on circumstances but flows from something — or Someone — deeper.
 - When Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, he wasn’t sitting on a beach or celebrating a victory. He was in prison, chained, confined, and unsure of what tomorrow would bring. And yet, this short letter radiates more joy than almost anything else he ever wrote. How is that possible?
 - Paul had discovered something we desperately need today: Joy is not found in isolation — it’s found in participation. Participation in Christ. Participation in His people. Participation in His mission.
 - The New Testament word for this is koinonia. It means fellowship, yes — but not the casual kind. It means shared life, shared purpose, shared grace, shared suffering, and shared joy. It’s the kind of unity that only happens when a community is rooted in Christ and shaped by His love.
 - Philippians is Paul’s invitation into this kind of life.
 - A life where Christ is our center, unity is our calling, humility is our posture, and joy is our fruit.
 - A life where we don’t just believe the gospel — we participate in it together.
 - Over the next several weeks, we’re going to walk through this letter and discover that:

- Joy grows where Christ is formed in us
- Joy deepens where humility is practiced
- Joy strengthens where suffering is shared
- Joy flourishes where peace is cultivated
- Joy overflows where generosity is embraced
- This is the joy of koinonia — the joy of living in unity with Christ and with one another. J.I. Packer (Theologian, Author) stated, “Christian fellowship is a sharing with others what God has made known to us about Himself.” It is about being invested, getting involved with others, and loving them the way that God has loved us.
- My prayer for you, for the church, and for this series is simple: That we would become a people whose joy is unshakeable because our unity with Christ is unbreakable.

IV. Marked by Grace

- Paul begins his letter with words we often rush past: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus...” He doesn’t lead with titles. He doesn’t lead with authority. He leads with identity — servants.
- **Philippians 1:1-2 NLT**
*This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus.
 I am writing to all of God’s holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and deacons.
 2 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.*
- This is the first note of koinonia: We are not a hierarchy of spiritual elites. We are a family of servants under one Lord.
- Then he addresses the church: saints — not because they’re perfect, but because they’re set apart in Christ for the good works which God has created beforehand; together — the plural matters. Being in community is important and is an identifying characteristic of believers in Christ. We are much better together; with the overseers and deacons — leadership included, but not elevated above the body
- And then he speaks two words that define Christian community:
 Grace — God’s unearned favor toward us
 Peace — God’s restoring presence among us.
- This is the soil where joy grows.
- Before Paul tells them anything to do, he reminds them who they are.
- Before he calls them to unity, he grounds them in grace.
- Before he prays for their growth, he affirms their identity.
- Joy begins with remembering who we are in Christ — together.

V. Partnership

- **Philippians 1:3-8 NLT**

3 Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. 4 Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, 5 for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. 6 And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

7 So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. 8 God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

- When Paul says, "I thank my God every time I remember you," it isn't just a polite opening. It's a deep breath of relief. Why? Because the Philippians weren't just a "congregation" to him — they were partners.
- In our world, "fellowship" usually means coffee and donuts after a meeting. It's a social club. But the koinonia Paul is talking about here is more like a shared foxhole or a business start-up. It's a "shared participation" in something much bigger than themselves.
- They shared five specific things with him:
 - The Mission: They weren't just fans of the Gospel; they were on the front lines spreading it. They weren't spectators in Paul's ministry; they were invested and laboring right alongside him.
 - The Struggle: When Paul was in chains, they didn't distance themselves — they leaned into whatever was taking place. They didn't distance themselves from Paul's suffering — they entered it. This is radical love in action.
 - The Cost: They shared their resources to keep the work going. They weren't just sending money — they were paying a price for the gospel in their own city. This is koinonia at its deepest level — shared wounds, shared courage, shared endurance.
 - The Love: Paul mentions he holds them in his heart with "tender compassion". This is the emotional core of koinonia: shared affection rooted in Christ.
 - The Change: They were watching God transform each other in real-time. They were co-laborers, co-sufferers, co-givers, co-intercessors, co-participants. All to the glory of God.
 - Paul is essentially saying: "My joy is tied to your growth because we are in this together".
- That is radically different from the "me and my Bible" individual spirituality we see today.
- And then he drops that famous line: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion..." (verse 6). We love to put that on coffee mugs as a private promise for our own lives. But look at the context—Paul wrote that to a church. If you feel "behind" in your faith, or like you're failing at this Christian life, Paul's word

for you is: "You're not behind. You're becoming". And the best part? You don't have to "become" all by yourself. God is committed to our "becoming" as a community.

VI. Life

- We all have had those times when a partner was what we needed. Not someone to fix the problem but to be there, in support and understanding, listening and caring. One of those times happened in my life awhile ago. It was on a basketball court, during a workout with a trainer. Life was unraveling, the hurt and stress were hard to carry, and I was worn out. During this training I began to break emotionally. The tears began to flow, it was hard to breathe, and I didn't know what to do. At that moment, there was someone to just listen, to hear the pain, to relate to the burden. No advice, just an ear to hear, and a shoulder to lean on. This opened the door for healing to begin.
- In the hour or so that I poured my heart out, there weren't interruptions or observations. It was mostly silence as much of what had been buried deep inside me spilled out. As alone as I had felt, someone stepped into my pain to let me know that I wasn't standing by myself.
- And in that moment, I understood something Paul understood ... joy doesn't come from escaping suffering. It comes from not suffering alone. That's *koinonia*. That's partnership in the gospel. That's the tender compassion Paul felt for the Philippians — and the compassion Christ shows to us.

VII. Prayer

- **Philippians 1:9-11 NLT**

9 I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. 10 For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. 11 May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

- Paul's prayer for the Philippians is one of the most beautiful windows into his pastoral heart. He doesn't begin by asking God to change their circumstances or remove their challenges. Instead, he asks God to deepen their love. Not a sentimental love or a surface-level kindness, but a Christ-shaped love that keeps growing, stretching, and overflowing. Paul knows that if love is expanding in a church, everything else can grow. Love is the engine of spiritual formation, the glue of unity, and the soil where joy takes root.
- But Paul doesn't stop with love. He prays that their love would be anchored in knowledge and discernment — that they would love well because they see clearly. Love without wisdom becomes naïve; wisdom without love becomes harsh. Paul wants a community whose love thinks, whose love discerns, whose love knows what honors Christ. He wants them to develop the spiritual instinct to choose what

is excellent, not just what is acceptable. In other words, he's praying that they would become people who consistently choose what matters most to Jesus.

- Then Paul turns toward the character of the community itself. He prays that they would be pure and blameless — not perfect, but sincere. People without hidden agendas. People who don't trip each other up. People whose lives are marked by integrity and transparency. This is the kind of community where spiritual growth becomes possible, where confession is safe, and where unity is protected. It's the heart of koinonia: a shared life shaped by Christ's character.
- And Paul knows none of this comes from human effort. So he prays that they would be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. Not fruit they manufacture, but fruit Christ produces in them. This is the secret of Christian growth — Christ in us, forming His life in His people. And when that happens, Paul says, God gets the glory and the church gets the joy. That's the trajectory of the entire prayer: a community overflowing with love, grounded in wisdom, marked by integrity, bearing the fruit of Christ, all to the glory of God.

VIII. Closing

- As we come to the end of this first message, I want us to hear Paul's heartbeat one more time.
- He's not just thankful for the Philippians — he's joyful because he sees Christ's life taking shape in them. He sees a community where love is growing, where grace is shared, where spiritual fruit is beginning to ripen. He sees koinonia — the shared life of Christ — and it fills him with confidence that God will finish what He started.
- And that's the invitation for us today. To believe that God is at work in us. To believe that He is forming something beautiful among us. To believe that joy is not something we manufacture — it's something we receive as Christ forms His life in our community.
- Because joy is not an isolated experience. It's not a private emotion. It's the overflow of Christ's life shared among His people.
- And that brings us to a simple but profound truth that captures everything Paul is praying for in this passage: "Joy is the echo of God's life in us, and fellowship is the place where that echo becomes a chorus."
- That's what Paul heard in the Philippians.
- That's what God wants to create in us. A chorus of joy rising from a people who share life in Christ — who grow together, pray together, serve together, and love one another with the love of Jesus.
- So as we begin this series, let's ask God to make us that kind of community.
- A community where His life echoes in every heart ... and becomes a chorus of joy in every gathering.
- Let's Pray
- Grace First, Grace Always