

The Church Plant at Philippi
Philippians 1:1–11
March 3, 2019

A lot of people might not assume this, understandably, but if you're going to trace the history of South Woods Baptist Church, you dare not underestimate the influence of Southern California. That's where, in August of 1986, Phil Newton heard one of his Fuller Seminary professors say this: "The most effective way to reach people is by planting new churches."¹ A number of months prior, before hearing that professor's statement in SoCal, the Lord gave Pastor Phil a burden to plant a church in a metropolitan area.² While church planting is in vogue these days, in '86 almost no one talked about it. However, it also *just so happened* that when the professor made that statement about church planting, sitting *next* to Pastor Phil was another student interested in this church planting idea. That student lived here in Memphis. Pastor Phil and that student spent their breaks from seminars the next couple weeks talking and dreaming about planting a church in the Memphis area.

Though that other student didn't end up being part of this fellowship, Pastor Phil and Karen and three of their kids moved to Memphis two months after that lecture. Within a few weeks of landing in Memphis, they visited Kirby Woods. The pastor of Kirby at the time happened to have a desire to plant a church in Southeast Memphis. At this point, Pastor Phil had no sponsoring church, no meeting place, and no name for the congregation. When Kirby Woods offered all three, he didn't need to lay out some fleece or cast lots to know the Lord's leading.³ About a dozen families from Kirby joined Pastor Phil and the Prouty family in beginning this new work. So, barely 8 months after hearing that professor in Southern California, South Woods Baptist Church had its first worship service a small stone's throw from where you're sitting. In the years that've followed, the Lord's used this body all over the globe for His glory.⁴ And in a little over a month,⁵ we'll rejoice in 32 years of the Lord's faithfulness to South Woods.

A couple thousand years before that lecture at Fuller, the Apostle Paul had certainly heard of church planting. He'd laid down the comforts of his life—traveling somewhere around 15,000 miles (without airfare)—to share the gospel message with the unbelieving world and plant communities of Christ-followers.⁶ For one example, in Acts 16 we read about Paul landing in Macedonia. The first major centre where Paul would preach the gospel in modern-day Europe would be in the city of Philippi.⁷

Philippi was something of a "Rome in miniature,"⁸ where in the relatively recent past, Octavian founded it as a Roman military colony.⁹ At various points since its founding, rulers populated the city—almost like we'd fill a small lake with bass—with Roman veterans from the war. This alleviated Rome's population issues and helped to ensure allegiance to the Empire.¹⁰ Because of

¹ Peter Wagner, in a Doctor of Ministry Seminar at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif.

² According to a conversation this week with Pastor Phil, this burden began in May of 1986. Pastor Phil told me that he considered planting in Denver at one time, but no one from the area returned his messages/calls. I'd call that a kind providence.

³ We're *South* of Kirby Woods.

⁴ Just this week, the person in charge of church partnerships at the fastest growing SBC seminary—Midwestern—asked to meet with us so he could hear about the legacy of pastor-training at South Woods. The Lord's been kind to use this body.

⁵ April 19th.

⁶ Eckhard Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary*, 122

⁷ Peter O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 3.

⁸ Alec Motyer, *Philippians*, BST, 15.

⁹ Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 25.

¹⁰ Fee, 26.

this, the citizens of Philippi enjoyed many of privileges of the most powerful city on the planet, as if they themselves lived on Italian soil.¹¹ The city was modeled on Rome. It was governed by Roman law.¹² If you couldn't say you were from swanky Rome, you could claim one of the next best things: the honored status of being a Philippian.

After the vision of the Lord in Acts 16, Paul came into this city. Alec Motyer writes, "A city with a famous past and privileged and proud present was about to hear the good news of a status conferred not by man but by God."¹³ It's possible that the Jewish antagonism was so palpable in Philippi that no synagogue was present; so rather than Paul going there first, he ends up finding a group of people by a river, including a lady from Thyatira named Lydia. Gloriously, Acts 16:14 records what happened next: *The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul*. Soon thereafter, others believed and were baptized (Acts 16:15). Then, after a strange episode with a slave girl, Paul and Silas encounter opposition and are thrown in a Philippian prison. And you know the story of that night, Acts 16:25: *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God*. The earth shook. The doors opened. Paul and Silas stayed put. The jailer rushed in, trembled, and asked, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* (Acts 16:31). Paul and Silas answered him. And then more believed. By the time Acts 16:40 comes around, brothers (plural) are gathered at Lydia's house. The Philippian church had been planted. The gospel ran, through God's workers, by His Spirit, to His people.

Now, who wrote that Acts account? The author we've spent the last year plus with: Luke. In Acts 16, we see him use "we" language. He's *with* Paul and Silas in Philippi. A number of scholars believe after Paul left Lydia's house church in Philippi to head for Thessalonica, he actually left Luke in Philippi to provide some initial leadership to the fledgling church plant.¹⁴

The Philippian church continued on; in fact, in many ways it thrived. This letter to the Philippians was likely written around 10–12 years after the church was established.¹⁵ 2000 years later, we're studying Paul's letter together.

Today, we're in the introduction. We'll see that *Paul writes the church at Philippi, expressing his affection for them, praying for affection among them, and pointing them to the One who provides both*. That will serve as our outline as well.

1. Paul writes the church at Philippi (vv. 1-2)

The letter begins, v. 1, *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus*. Immediately before Paul met Lydia in Acts 16, he met Timothy. He'd soon become one of Paul's primary co-laborers.¹⁶ In chapter 2 of this letter, we'll see that Paul hoped to send Timothy to the Philippian church soon, meaning they'd enjoyed something of a close relationship prior.¹⁷ To not include Timothy in this introduction might've even been surprising to those who received the letter.

To describe himself and Timothy, he uses the term, *servants of Christ Jesus*. It's worth asking: Does Paul have more impressive titles he could've listed? In both Romans 1 and Titus 1, he includes "apostle" alongside "servant." In the two letters to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and in 1 and 2 Timothy, he too uses "apostle" in his introduction. Did he have more impressive titles than servant? Absolutely. It's worth noting, however, that the Philippian context to which Paul wrote *obsessed* over rank and titles, as "prizes to be competitively sought and publicly

¹¹ See Motyer, 15.

¹² O'Brien, 4.

¹³ Motyer, 15.

¹⁴ See O'Brien, 8; Moises Silva, *Philippians*, BEC, 2.

¹⁵ See Eckhard Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary*, 96.

¹⁶ Paul isn't out to make a name for himself; he shares ministry.

¹⁷ Silva, 39.

proclaimed.”¹⁸ In the first seven words of this letter, we’re already seeing Paul hint at a major theme of his epistle, that of humility.

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. That’s who is writing. If there were return addresses, those guys would be listed. But the front of the envelope needs a name. Who are they writing? Verse 1 continues, *To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.*

He’s writing the saints in Christ Jesus. In the years to follow, Roman influences would mar the glories of this word “saint.” But Paul doesn’t have in mind a subgroup within the larger congregation. Saint might be translated “holy ones.” To put it simply, those made holy are those *in Christ Jesus*. Paul’s not addressing an elite group of über-Christians; he’s addressing Christians. Furthermore, Paul goes to repeated lengths in this letter to use the word “all.”¹⁹ Paul writes here, *To all the saints.*

But he *is* addressing all the Christians in a particular locale. *To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.* The church that initially met in Lydia’s house is the local church he’s writing.

In the 10 or 12 years since Lydia met Paul by the river, this church appears to have matured and chosen leadership. But the leadership wasn’t considered separate from the body. Note Paul’s use of “with,” *with the overseers and deacons*. The leaders were numbered *among* the body.²⁰ They were sheep as well as shepherds. Rather than an outside group dictating decisions, the leaders are *part* of the Philippian church.

I think you can hear my not-so-subtle critique of other forms of church government, or polity. And while that’s not the main issue in this passage, we shouldn’t completely dismiss the implications. First, as I’ve said, it appears that the Philippian church had leaders that belonged to the body. Second, note the two offices. The New Testament uses overseer, elder, and pastor synonymously. Therefore, to list the two offices, you could say overseers and deacons, elders and deacons, or pastors and deacons. All three would technically be correct. But you know what wouldn’t be correct? Overseer (singular) and deacons; elder and deacons; or pastor and deacons. Like the word for elders throughout the New Testament, overseers here is in the plural. To sum up some of the church government lessons here: leaders are *from* the congregation; there are two offices; there is a plurality of leadership. I think at this point we should all pause and reflect on the amount of restraint demonstrated in me writing one singular paragraph on church government.²¹

This church has grown up, established leadership, and continues doing ministry in the city of Philippi. Now that we know who wrote the letter, and to whom it was addressed, we can get to the introduction. Paul writes the church at Philippi in v.2, *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul does something here that would’ve been clear to the original readers. Because the standard introduction to letters in this era would include the sender of the letter, the name of the one being addressed, and then they’d include a word that would be the equivalent of our word: “Greetings!” That word was pronounced *χαίρειν* (chairein). Here Paul, in a similar way, includes the sender of the letter, the name of the one being addressed, but instead of *χαίρειν* he does a play on words, writing the very similar, *χαρις*, the word we translate “grace.”²²

This was no ordinary letter. Paul took the conventions of the day and brought his Christianity to bear upon them.

¹⁸ Joseph Hellerman, *Philippians*, EGGNT, 11.

¹⁹ We’ll read every, all, you all, multiple times in this text alone.

²⁰ O’Brien, 48.

²¹ For more on this, resources include (*cough*, in order of importance), Phil Newton, *Elders in the Life of the Church*; John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*; Ben Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, etc.

²² O’Brien, 50.

We're used to hearing the phrase, "Grace and peace to you." But note here that's not precisely what it says. Instead Paul writes, *Grace to you and peace*. One man writes, "God gives grace; peace is the result of that gift."²³

And that peace comes *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. Now, just as church government wasn't the main issue in the previous verse, the doctrine of Christ's person might not have been the main emphasis of this greeting. Nonetheless, these theological truths ought to be mined and gloried in.

In this era, Roman emperors were often referred to as *κύριος*, or Lord. In this Roman colony of Philippi, this kind of allegiance to the empire would've been pronounced (and pressured). Both Nero and Domitian would soon be referred to as "lord." So, for the early church, the phrase "Jesus is Lord" became the subtle rebellion of those whose allegiance ultimately belonged to a different political realm, a different kingdom. Paul writes, *The Lord Jesus Christ*. As a Jew, Paul grew up reciting the Shema, *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one*. Here he employs both "Lord" and "God" but the confession *now* includes the person of Jesus.²⁴ He is that Lord.

Ultimately, Paul didn't plant this church. The *Lord* opened Lydia's heart. Paul told the Philippian jailer, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved* (Acts 16:31).

Paul wrote the saints *in Christ Jesus* who were at Philippi.

2. . . . Expressing his affection for them (vv. 3–8)

In my job, I occasionally have to write a letter (or email) to a church or church leaders that I don't know. All of us might write professional letters to people we don't have deep affection for. This is *not* one of those letters.

Paul loved this group of believers. His language is warm with affection. Note verse 3: *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you*.²⁵ Now, if you're seeking Instagrammable bible verses, or if you're looking to crochet something Pauline, this would be a strong choice. However, I'm not so sure every house with a framed copy understands what Paul refers to here.

What does he mean by *in all my remembrance of you*? The answer's found in verse 4: *always in every prayer of mine*. When Paul prays, he remembers the Philippian church. And when he remembers the Philippian church, he thanks God. John O's book on prayer included a quote from J. C. Ryle that pertains here: "We are all selfish by nature, and our selfishness is very apt to stick to us, even when we are converted. There is a tendency in us to think only of our own souls, our own spiritual conflicts, our own progress in religion, and to forget others. . . . We should stir ourselves up to name other names besides our own before the throne of grace. . . . This is the highest charity. He loves me best who loves me in his prayers."²⁶

Paul's expressing his affection, in particular his thanksgiving, for them. Note again the use of the word for all,²⁷ v. 4, *always in every prayer of mine for you all*. O'Brien explains the significance of "all" here, "Paul is grateful to God for the entire Philippian congregation—for all without exception."²⁸ Rather than some subset of preferred personalities, he's thinking of and thanking God for the entire body. In sensing the force of this text, the questions we have to wrestle with are these: Is Paul overstating the reality? Is he lying? Or is he telling the truth?

²³ Hellerman, 13, paraphrasing Fee, 70.

²⁴ See Hellerman, 14–15.

²⁵ O'Brien thinks this should reference the Philippians' remembrance of Paul, but Silva, Fee, and Hellerman disagree.

²⁶ J. C. Ryle, quoted in John Onwuchekwa, *Prayer*, 61.

²⁷ πᾶς

²⁸ O'Brien, 58.

He not only thanks God for them when he prays, other affections pervade his intercession. Verse 4: *always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.*

This letter, and the letter to Philemon, are the only epistles where the introduction includes this word for joy.²⁹ We'll talk more about this next week, but we should keep in mind that Paul didn't write this letter from the comforts of an Italian Villa. He's writing the Philippian church while bound in the city of Rome.³⁰ This is one of his prison epistles. And while it's not as scary as his second Roman imprisonment, next week we'll see that he knows it's possible this imprisonment would lead to martyrdom.

Why tell you all that? Because, despite that reality, the letter of Philippians is full of this word for joy. Imprisoned, he thanks God for the Philippians, for each and every one of them, and he does so rejoicing. An unflappable joy in the midst of adversity permeates the entirety of the letter.³¹

Why does he feel that affection: both thanksgiving and joy? Verse 5: *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.* Partnership here is, thanks to Christian coffee shops and publishing houses, one of the Greek words we might know: *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*). This word, translated partnership, participation,³² or sharing,³³ is the reason for Paul's thanksgiving and joy.³⁴

What is this partnership in? Verse 5: *because of your partnership in the gospel.* Now, if I were to ask you, "Which of Paul's letters do you think employs the word for gospel most in proportion?" Would you have answered Philippians? I'm not sure I would have. But that's the case.³⁵ We'll see in this letter that the Philippian church was involved in the proclamation of the gospel (1:27; 2:16).³⁶ They'd suffered alongside Paul for the sake of the gospel (1:30). And they'd interceded for him in his gospel efforts (1:19). In short, they'd partnered with Paul in the gospel.

And they'd done so for an extended period of time. Paul writes, v. 5, *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.* Much of the occasion for this letter was Paul's thank you for a recent financial gift from the church.³⁷ That's a key part of this partnership. Those 15,000 miles he traveled spreading the gospel and planting churches were strengthened by the gifts of this young congregation.

From the first day could refer to the gift this church sent during Paul's 18 months in Corinth in Acts 18, shortly after meeting him. Then, speaking of Corinth, Paul would write in 2 Corinthians 8:1 of *another* gift from them, *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.* What is this grace of God? V. 2, *For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.* Here's the Macedonian math: Joy + poverty = generosity. This would've included the Philippian church.

This church supported Paul early on while he was in Corinth, then they sent another gift, unprompted by Paul, and the occasion of this letter is yet another financial gift. That's why he writes, *from the first day until now.*

Though they weren't wealthy, necessarily, I'm not sure there's a church more known for their generosity in the New Testament than this fellowship of believers. Paul thanked God for them. When he prayed for them, he interceded for them with joy. He's expressing his affection for them.

²⁹ Silva, 43.

³⁰ O'Brien, 20; Silva, 7.

³¹ Silva, 43.

³² NASB

³³ NRSV

³⁴ Fee, 81; Hellerman, 23.

³⁵ Hellerman, 23.

³⁶ 2:16 is one of the clearest evangelistic verses in the entirety of the NT.

³⁷ Silva, 44.

We'll come back to the glories of verse 6, but note how Paul further describes his joy and thankfulness for this church in verse 7: *It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart.* After expressing his deep affection, he won't hedge. In fact, he'll double down. "I should feel this way. It's right!" We should not limit "feel" to mere emotion, either. That word would include his thoughts, his feelings, *and* his will.³⁸ *All* of him is wrapped up with *all* the Philippians.

Then, in verse 7, he repeats the partnership emphasis, but also makes it more specific, v. 7b, *for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.* The word for partakers is derived from the *κοινωνία* language used earlier in describing their partnership. In this case, it's as if the Philippians are "fellow participants" in the grace God's given Paul to spread the gospel.

And Paul makes clear that they didn't just participate in favorable circumstances. *In the defense of the gospel*, they participated with him. That means when opponents were against him, as was often the case, the Philippians were with him. *In the confirmation of the gospel*, they participated with him. That means when the gospel advanced miraculously,³⁹ they didn't think, "Paul doesn't need us now." No, they stood by him. And finally, Paul writes, *in my imprisonment* for the gospel, they participated with him. I found Moises Silva's comments helpful here: "The Philippians, who had no way of knowing that this confinement (imprisonment) had opened new avenues for the spread of the gospel (vv. 12–14), had shown their constancy and commitment to the apostolic ministry by supporting Paul even when, to the best of their knowledge, he was not 'producing.'"⁴⁰

Many had abandoned him; but not this local church. In all circumstances, they partnered with Paul. And, likewise, Paul won't act as if it's *his* ministry alone; no, these Philippians are partakers with him, fellow participants, in the gospel's advance.

When you consider this, verse 8 makes sense: *For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.* Now, let's ask ourselves, how many people would you be willing to say that about? "I'd like to call to the stand the One who sees my heart. He'll tell you how I feel about _____." For most of us, that's a short list. Paul's affections were such that He gladly called God as witness to his affections for them. And he's not saying he likes them a little bit. He uses the strongest term possible to describe those affections.⁴¹

But note: these deep affections are not described as Paul's affections primarily, but as the affection of Christ Jesus. The love Christ has for the Philippians⁴² is the kind of affection Paul experienced for them.

Now, I've mostly painted the Philippians in a positive light, but don't think that in Acts 16 the Philippians—very recently pagans—were *immediately* transformed into quasi-angelic beings. No, they had their issues that we'll see in this letter: selfish ambition, anxiety, disunity, etc. This is where Paul's affections mirror Christ's. He loved them anyway.

Paul wasn't looking for the photoshopped, edited, so-called romance of relationship. He loved the people he knew. He didn't feel affection for a vague "humanity," or the invisible ideal of church, made up of members whose names we don't know, or those who haven't sinned against us. He loved actual people, this visible local church in Philippi.

³⁸ Hellerman, 26.

³⁹ See J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, 85.

⁴⁰ Silva, 48.

⁴¹ *Σπλαγγνα*, Silva, 48.

⁴² Fee, 95.

3. . . . Praying for discerning affection among them (vv. 9–10)

Maybe that last part sounds hard, namely, loving real people. It is. And Paul knew it. So, when he prayed for the Philippians, he didn't only thank God for them, he also interceded for their continued growth.⁴³ Verse 9: *And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.* While Paul thanked God for their present partnership in the gospel, that didn't mean they'd arrived. Paul would express this same idea concerning himself in chapter 3: *Not that I have already obtained or have already become perfect, but I press on* (3:12). The affection among the Philippians was “present, yet partial.”⁴⁴

Here he prays that their love may abound more and more.

Now, before you bring all kinds of Hallmark baggage to the term “love,” note how Paul qualifies it, v. 9, *And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.* Hear Moises Silva again: “We should note the ease with which Paul intertwines knowledge and love. The apostle cares not for any (false) knowledge that fails to issue in love. But it is just as important to reflect that Paul does not view love as mindless.”⁴⁵ *Love with knowledge and all discernment.*

As in English, the Greek term for knowledge is broader than the term for discernment. Discernment is a type of knowledge. It's likely that by including and connecting both, Paul is specifying the kind of knowledge he praying for. It's a “how do I love?” this or that person.

In this congregation, selfish ambition, pride, and other dissensions had been made known to Paul through Epaphroditus.⁴⁶ When those kinds of issues arise, one needs clarity and wisdom as to how to love another person. It's not as simple as: “just love them.” No, does love mean I speak the truth? What does speaking the truth look like? Does love mean I need to show grace here? What should I say? Or not say? Who needs a phone call? Or a text? The inclusion of the phrase, “all” discernment, likely refers to having discernment in every situation.⁴⁷ So, what does it mean to love *this* person in this or that scenario? That's what Paul's praying for the church.

Paul prays this for the Philippians, v. 10, *So that you may approve what is excellent.* This is as practical as it gets. Paul prays for the Philippians to have a kind of discerning love that would help them make day-to-day decisions—in their life together and in their interactions with the world—that would honor Christ. And this is part of their holiness, v. 10 continues, *So that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.* Speaking in negative terminology, Paul prays that they might have the kind of discerning love that would keep blame away. In more positive terminology, Paul prays this discerning love would lead to purity.

Since all the verbs and adjectives here are plural, it's clear Paul prays this for the community, not merely the individuals.⁴⁸ He wanted them corporately to grow more in more in their love, with knowledge and all discernment.

And this is *for the day of Christ*, in view of that day. I had a seminary professor who regularly said, “The Christian has two days on his or her calendar. This day and *that* day. And he or she asks himself or herself, “How do I live *this* day in light of *that* day?”⁴⁹

Paul wrote the church at Philippi, expressing His affection for them, praying for discerning affection among them, and finally,

⁴³ Paul's the one in prison. Still, he prays for others.

⁴⁴ Silva, 49.

⁴⁵ Silva, 50.

⁴⁶ Epaphroditus is the one who brought Paul the most recent financial gift.

⁴⁷ Πᾶσι is distributive. Hellerman, 31.

⁴⁸ Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, PNTC, 61.

⁴⁹ Dr. Stan May.

4. . . . pointing them to the One who provides both (vv. 11; v. 6)

Paul describes something, and prays for something, of the effect of this discerning love in Verse 11: *filled with the fruit of righteousness*. Like the Spirit produces fruit in Galatians 5, these Philippians were in Christ, counted righteous, and *from* that righteousness would issue fruit. The image is reminiscent of Psalm 1:3, picturing an orchard of trees loaded down with a full crop of good fruit.⁵⁰

In the context of this letter, this fruit of righteousness might include, “being of one mind,” “in humility counting others better than themselves,” “doing all things without grumbling,” “displaying love toward one another,” and “thinking on things that are lovely, just, and worthy of praise.” One might say, in summary, *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil. 2:12).⁵¹ Silva writes, “The object of Paul’s prayer is the total sanctification of the Philippians.”⁵²

But to attempt any of this, to strive for this kind of Christ-like action or affection, *on our own*, is to strive toward guilt-ridden failure. So Paul makes clear, v. 11, *filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ*. Paul wasn’t describing *Paul’s* affections mainly, but the affections of Christ Jesus (v. 8). This fruit only comes through Him. We’ve said before: you’re not bearing fruit by stapling apples to the tree.⁵³

Which is where the glory of verse 6 makes the most sense. Though their love is partial, Paul gives thanks for what’s present. He’s seen enough fruit to be confident, v. 6, *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*. Paul’s been persuaded; and is therefore convinced: Christ had worked in them, was working in them, and would continue working in and through this church.

He’d fill them with the fruit of righteousness. And when He does this, verse 11’s end is appropriate, *filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God*. His work. His glory. His praise.

Conclusion

When I decided this week I wanted to introduce the Philippians study by talking about the planting of South Woods, I asked Pastor Phil if he’d written down anything about South Woods’ planting story. I’ve heard it a number of times, but didn’t have anything in writing. He told me to look in his office for a little pamphlet, close to his dissertations.⁵⁴ Like I was a historian deep in the archives, I started nerding through a stack of journals and pamphlets. Chris was getting some coffee that morning, and I eventually yelled to him, “Found it!”

What did I find? The pamphlet was a bulletin from January 24, 1988 for the Dedication Service for South Woods. Within that pamphlet was a section entitled, “Our Story.” Many of the things I’d heard in membership classes over the years were written down there, including a few other details I hadn’t heard. I read that pamphlet, called Pastor Phil to fill in a few gaps, and wrote the introduction to this sermon.

Then, as I was completing my study of the text, I was looking at verse 11, *filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ*, and I looked over at that dedication bulletin sitting on the edge of my desk. And what I hadn’t noticed before suddenly appeared afresh. On the cover of that pamphlet from 1988 was a tree, with the text printed beneath it: *And he shall be like a tree, planted by the*

⁵⁰ Hellerman, 34; Hansen, 62.

⁵¹ See O’Brien, 81.

⁵² Silva, 52.

⁵³ Paul Tripp illustration in Jonathan Leeman, *The Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, 306.

⁵⁴ Yes, dissertations in the plural.

rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.


And I thought: The Lord is faithful. He's answered Paul's prayer.

Paul loved this Philippian congregation. He'd seen fruit among them. For that, he gave thanks, doing so with joy. He prayed that the love among them might abound more and more. And Paul was confident that God would complete His work, filling them with the fruit of righteousness.

We could say the same about the saints in Christ Jesus who are at South Woods.⁵⁵

To the glory and praise of God (v. 11). He has done it. He is doing it. And He will complete it.

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And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Psalm 1:3

Dedication Service

⁵⁵ Trees planted by streams of water bear fruit. Planted churches dependent on Christ do the same.