

JOY IN THE PARTNERSHIP

Philippians 1:1–11

Introduction: Unfinished

I've had my share of uncomfortable moments in life. I clearly remember the discomfort I felt around the age of 10 every time I took the stairs from the first to the second floor in our home. There, sitting on a shelf, looking at me dead in the eyes, was a statue.

Not just any statue.

A naked statue of a man. In all his glory. Looking right at me.

I asked myself, "Who in their right mind would place a statue of a naked man in plain view?"

It always made me uncomfortable.

As an adult, I came to learn that this statue was a miniature replica of Michelangelo's *David*, a statue that stands over fourteen feet tall and took four years to complete from 1501 to 1504. My mom purchased it in Italy in the 1980s.

[Show Michaelangelo's David Statue]

What is remarkable is not just the finished product — but the process. Chiseling and polishing. Chiseling and polishing. A massive slab of marble slowly transformed into something breathtaking.

Who could imagine that such beauty could be sculpted from a block of stone?

Even more fascinating are the sculptures Michelangelo never finished. They're called *The Prisoners* — figures that look like they are emerging from the stone but still trapped in it. Half-formed. Unfinished. Potential visible — but incomplete.

[Show Michaelangelo's Prisoners Statue]

Sometimes I wonder if that's how the church can feel.

You can see the beauty.

You can see the grace.

You can see the work of God.

But we are not finished yet.

Tonight, we turn to Paul's letter to the Philippians. And what we find is a group of believers who love God, love one another, and love the gospel — but who are still unfinished.

And instead of scolding them, Paul overflows with joy.

Here's the big idea: **Gospel joy grows when believers link arms in God's mission.**

1. Joy Rooted in Gospel Community (vv. 3–5)

Paul writes:

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."

Did you notice the repetition?

Every time.

All my prayers.

All of you.

Always with joy.

What is the source of his joy?

"Because of your partnership in the gospel."

The Philippians were not passive observers. They were partners.

They had come to know Jesus through Paul's missionary journey. They had seen him suffer so that they could hear the gospel. Now Paul is in prison again — and they have sent him generous financial gifts despite their own poverty.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul says that out of their "severe poverty" welled up "rich generosity."

They gave.

They prayed.

They sent help.

They stood with him.

They linked arms in the mission.

And that produced joy.

Romans 12:5 says, "We, though many, are one body in Christ."

1 Corinthians 12:27 says, "You are the body of Christ."

Joy grows in shared mission.

The Joy of a Pastoral Team

Let me tell you where I see this in real life every single week.

Pastoral ministry is not light work.

There are weeks where we walk from one hospital room to another.

Weeks where we carry grief, conflict, hard decisions.

Weeks where someone is angry.

Weeks where someone is hurting.

Weeks where we're praying over situations we can't fix.

There are days where the emotional and spiritual weight is very real.

And yet — I can honestly say — one of the greatest sources of joy in my life is working alongside our pastoral team.

You see us on Sundays looking somewhat composed.

What you don't see is Tuesday morning.

Tuesday morning is sacred.

That's when we sit around a table — sometimes tired, sometimes overwhelmed — and within about 90 seconds someone says something ridiculous and we're all laughing.

Hard.

Like, shouldn't-be-laughing-this-hard laughing.

There have been moments where we are discussing something incredibly serious, and somehow it derails into a five-minute argument about something completely unimportant. And for a moment, the weight lifts.

Why?

Because we're not carrying it alone.

There is something powerful about looking across the table and knowing:

We're in this together.

We pray together.

We wrestle together.

We disagree sometimes.

We sharpen each other.

We carry each other.

There are Sundays when I walk off this platform emotionally spent — and one of them will just put a hand on my shoulder and say, “That was good. The Lord is using you.”

That brings joy. Not because the work is easy. But because the work is shared.

If I had to do this alone — I don’t know how long I’d last.

But linking arms week after week?

Laughing together.

Praying together.

Standing firm together.

That produces joy. And that is exactly what Paul is talking about. He’s not rejoicing because life is light. He’s rejoicing because he is not alone. “Because of your partnership in the gospel...”

That’s what partnership does. It doesn’t remove the weight — it redistributes it. And when the weight is shared, joy rises.

Church, some of the deepest joy you will ever experience in the Christian life will come not from comfort — but from co-laboring in the gospel.

Serving side by side.

Giving sacrificially.

Praying fervently.

Standing firm together.

Paul is chained. Restricted. Uncertain of his future. And yet he says, “I always pray with joy.”

Why?

Because partnership produces joy.

2. Joy Anchored in God’s Faithfulness (v. 6)

Then Paul gives one of the most hope-filled statements in Scripture:

“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.”

Notice who begins the work.

God.

Notice who carries it on.

God.

Notice who completes it.

God.

The Philippians are holy — Paul calls them “God’s holy people” — not because they have arrived, but because they belong to Christ.

When you have believed in Jesus for salvation, He calls you holy — not because of your behavior, but because of your Savior.

But here’s the beauty: the God who declares you holy is the God who is making you holy.

And not just individually.

Corporately.

Paul’s confidence is not in their strength. It is in God’s faithfulness.

Lamentations 3 says, “Great is your faithfulness.”

Jude 24 says He is able “to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless.”

The same God who began His work in Philippi will finish it.

He will not abandon His artwork.

He will not leave the sculpture trapped in stone.

He will not leave His church unfinished.

And this is where joy stabilizes.

If our joy depended on our consistency, it would collapse.

If our joy depended on perfect unity, it would disappear.

But our joy is anchored in the faithfulness of God.

He began it.

He sustains it.

He will complete it.

Testimony: Teriann, Walking with Jesus

And because He is faithful, we can link arms with confidence.

3. Joy That Overflows in Love (vv. 9–11)

Paul continues:

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight...”

Notice he doesn't pray that they become famous.

He doesn't pray that they become comfortable.

He prays that their love would overflow.

But not shallow love.

Not sentimental love.

Love shaped by knowledge and discernment.

Love that knows God deeply.

Love that approves what is excellent.

Love that bites the coin to test its authenticity.

Why?

“So that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”

This is not emotional mush. This is purposeful, informed, gospel-shaped love.

Love that deepens as knowledge deepens.

Colossians 1 echoes this — growing in knowledge so that we may live lives worthy of the Lord.

And what is the result?

“Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.”

Notice the direction:

Partnership → Growing Love → Fruit → God's Glory.

The Philippians' generosity was fruit. Their loyalty was fruit. Their participation was fruit.

Fruit follows faith.

Salvation is a gift of grace.

But gospel partnership produces visible fruit.

When God's grace grips a community, generosity flows.
Encouragement flows.
Sacrifice flows.

And joy multiplies.

A Picture of Real Community

Let me say this clearly: Biblical Christianity is not solo Christianity.

It is not "Jesus and me alone."

The Philippians give us a picture of believers deeply committed to one another and to the mission of Christ.

They shared in grace together.
They suffered together.
They gave together.
They rejoiced together.

Paul says in verse 7, "*All of you share in God's grace with me.*"

That word "share" is the same partnership language.

They were in it together.

And that togetherness produced joy.

Not because they were perfect.

But because they were united in mission under a faithful God.

Sincere Lives Before a Faithful God

Paul says they are to be "pure and blameless" — a word that in the ancient world carried the idea of being judged by sunlight.

In the marketplaces of Philippi, pottery vendors would sometimes fill cracks with wax and paint over them. The vessel looked fine — until heat revealed the flaw.

Paul is praying for sincerity.

Real love.
Real holiness.
Real fruit.

Not performance.

Because joy does not grow in pretense.

It grows in authentic partnership.

When believers are honest.

When they repent quickly.

When they forgive generously.

When they pursue what is excellent.

[Story time: Turkey, daily sharing our testimonies, raw, unfiltered.]

That kind of community shines.

And Jesus said in Matthew 5:

“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

The goal is not our reputation.

It is “the glory and praise of God.”

Bringing It Together

So what do we see in Philippians 1:1–11?

We see a joyful apostle in chains.

We see a generous church in poverty.

We see a faithful God who finishes what He starts.

And we see believers linked together in gospel mission.

The Philippians were not finished sculptures.

But they were in the hands of a faithful Artist.

And they were standing shoulder to shoulder in the work.

That produces joy.

Application

So let me gently ask:

Are you linked in?

Not just attending.
Not just agreeing.
But partnering?

Joy grows when believers link arms in God's mission.

When you pray for the mission.
When you give toward the mission.
When you serve in the mission.
When you endure hardship together.

That is where joy deepens.

And underneath all of it is this promise:

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

God is faithful.

He will finish what He started.

He will not leave His church trapped in the marble.

One day, on the day of Christ, the sculpture will be complete.

And heaven will be God's gallery — displaying redeemed, refined, radiant people — to the glory and praise of His name.

So church —

Link arms.
Trust the faithful God.
Let love abound more and more.
Pursue what is excellent.
Bear fruit together.

Because gospel joy grows when believers link arms in God's mission.

Let's pray.