

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

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No: 15

Philippians Chapter 1:1-11

Faith under pressure

"A good old moan" seems to be the normal basis for conversation in Britain. We complain about the weather, about our aches and pains, the government, the trains, the buses, our children, our parents If we listened carefully to ourselves we would perhaps see just how negative about life we often are. If we were honest, however, we would see just how little we really have to complain about as we often say, "There's always those worse off than yourself." Paul was someone who learned how to triumph, even in very difficult circumstances. When he wrote this letter he was in prison facing a possible death sentence. He had often encountered real difficulties - opposition and physical persecution, hunger and thirst and the pressures of life as a leader in the early church - bringing people to faith, helping them grow and worrying when things went wrong.

Paul had at least four motives in mind as he wrote this letter. For one, it served as a "thank you" note to the believers in Philippi for their love and for their partnership in the gospel (1:5; 4:10-19). Secondly, It was also a report on his situation (1:12-26; 4:10-19). He wanted them to know that he was not discouraged even though he was in prison. Thirdly, reports of how false teachers were bringing their damaging doctrines into the church prompted him to warn them to stand firm against these errors (2:27-28; 3:2—4; 18-19). Finally, and perhaps most importantly given the way Paul works up to it in the letter, he was concerned about a serious clash between two women in the church whose disagreement was apparently affecting the unity of the whole body (4:2-3).

READ PHILIPPIANS 1.1-11

Aim: to discover the sort of concern we should have for our fellow Christians.

Begin here: Think of a friend you have known longest. When did you last see each other? How do you keep in touch? Talk about these friends in twos and threes.

THE LETTER

- Who wrote this letter?
- To whom is this letter written?
- Where is Philippi?
- How do we keep in touch with Christian friends?

THE WRITER

If this passage was the only source for our knowledge of Paul what would we know about him?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

THE READERS

What does this passage tell us about the Christians in Philippi?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

THE PRAYER

If Paul was praying verse 9 for our church, what would we look for as evidence that his prayers were being answered?

What does it mean to be growing in:

- love:
- knowledge:
- depth of insight?:.....

Why are these qualities important?

ACTION: On a scale of **1 - 10 (1 is weak, 10 is strong)**

Is our Church growing in love?

Is our church growing in knowledge?

Is our church growing in depth of insight?

How do we show our partnership in the Gospel today?

What can we learn *from* verse 1 about Christian ministry?

What was Paul's confidence about the Christians at Philippi (verse 6)?

How can that confidence encourage us in our concern for our fellow-Christians?

How does this passage illustrate our total dependence on God's grace and power?

How do we respond to Christians in difficult circumstances? Are we ashamed of them? Do we ignore them? Do we stand with them as the Philippians did with Paul (*v. 7*)?

What are the gains of so doing?

How do we develop the sort of discernment Paul is speaking about in verses 9- 11?

What ways have you found helpful in praying for Christian friends and the church's mission?

This passage is also:

- ✦ about Labels (Paul calls his readers 'saints' and himself a 'slave');
- ✦ about two 'Big Gospel Words' ('grace' and 'peace');
- ✦ about Thanking God for other Christians' progress and gifts;
- ✦ about asking God to give or do things for brothers and sisters in Christ.

The activities that follow try to come at these four ideas at a bit of an angle.

ACTIVITY 1

WHAT'S IT TO ME? (GRACE AND PEACE)

It is easy to let words like grace and peace trip lightly off the tongue without really asking what they mean. This exercise tries to force us to think out what they might mean to different people. It's easier to work in pairs or even threes. Don't be afraid to doodle and experiment.

Produce two acrostics.

Acrostics are sayings where the initial letter of a number of words taken together make up another word. The most famous is the early Christian sign 'Ichthus' (fish) which stands for Iesous Christos Theou Uios Soter (Jesus Christ God's Son Saviour).

Bible teachers explain Grace by saying it stands for "God's Riches At Christ's Expense".

You have to produce an acrostic for GRACE and PEACE. Your acrostic has to bring out what the words really mean. Talk about what each word means to you and then try to produce acrostics for the following people: a teenager; a child; a senior citizen; a non-Christian; yourself.

It was	G od
who	R eally
	A rranged
your	C onversion
	E xperience
And,	
Life is	P retty
	E xcruciating
and	A wful
but	C hrist
is in	E verything

"The New Testament emphasises that grace is the free gift of God and that it is not the outcome of man's deserving."

"The biblical sense of peace is determined by the Hebrew word 'shalom' - 'wellbeing', 'harmony'... 'the free growth of the soul'... 'harmonious community'... 'wellbeing manifested in every kind of good for man, bodily health, strengthening and security, happiness'... 'The normal and proper condition of men in relationship with one another'. 'Unbroken union with the Father in the midst of adversity, which is the supreme gift of Jesus to the disciples."

THE PRAYER LETTER

This passage gives us an insight into Paul's prayer life and his prayer list. As he prays for the Philippians he follows this pattern:

A Label ("saints"), A Thank you, A conviction, and A Request.

Following the pattern given above, write the prayers of Paul for your church (what label would you like Paul to address your church by, what does he thank God for, what is he absolutely certain of and what would be his request).