

Partners in the Gospel: God's Unfinished Work in Us

A Letter from a Joyful Prisoner (Phil 1:1)

Most people write letters of thanks when things are going well. Paul wrote this while under house arrest in Rome, facing potential execution.

How can a man in chains be happy? It's because he isn't looking at his circumstances; he's looking at his partners. He's looking at a group of people in Philippi who stood by him when the world walked away.

Imagine you're in a prison cell, chains on your wrists, uncertainty about tomorrow, and yet your heart is overflowing with joy. That's where the apostle Paul finds himself when he writes the letter to the Philippians.

Paul founded the church at Philippi during his second missionary journey about 51 A.D. Philippi was the very first church planted in Europe. When he writes from prison, **he's not complaining; he's thanking God.**

And the reason? This little church in Philippi has captured his heart because they get what the Christian life is really about: **partnership in the gospel.**

Paul starts with a simple greeting, but it's loaded with meaning. He calls himself and Timothy **"servants"** of Christ Jesus. Despite being apostles and leaders, he identifies himself with a title of humility.

He could have said, "Paul, an apostle of Christ," as he often did.

He could have said, "Paul, the person who first shared the gospel with you and who founded your church."

He could have pulled rank, but he didn't. This letter is all about being partners in the gospel, so instead Paul emphasizes that he and Timothy are fellow servants of Christ Jesus.

This is a willing, loving service to their master. It indicates that Paul and Timothy are on call 24/7, obedient to whatever Jesus commanded, regardless of personal cost.

We Are All Saints in Christ Jesus (Phil 1:1) This letter is addressed to *"all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi."* A saint is not some super-spiritual Christian who was assigned some super-spiritual task. Every believer is a saint, not just the super-spiritual ones in history books.

You're not a saint because of charitable works or charisma; or generosity to Christian work. You're a saint because of your position. **You are "in Christ."**

Paul calls them "holy people" or "saints." Not because they're perfect, but because they're set apart in Christ. **If you've trusted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you're a saint.**

So who were these saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi?

According to Acts 16 you had people like Lydia, a wealthy, high status woman who dealt in purple cloth. You had the Philippian jailer and his family, who would have been much lower status.

And you had people from the very lowest ranks of society like the slave girl out of whom Paul cast a demon, and everyday folks. **Jews, Gentiles, rich, poor, powerful, marginalized**

Like any church, you had a group of people from very diverse backgrounds who had all come together through the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Yet the gospel united them. It still does today.**

What unites us isn't our similarities—it's Christ. The gospel is the great unifier. All one!

The gospel tears down walls and builds a new family. We're all in this gospel mission together, praying, giving, serving, sharing our faith. Leaders equip; the whole body builds itself up in love.

He writes to everyone, the everyday believers, the overseers (like elders), and the deacons (those serving practically). From the very beginning, Paul levels the playing field.

He addresses them together. Why? Because leaders in the church are partners together.

Ministry isn't a hierarchy where leaders do all the work and everyone else watches.

Paul's Greeting Phil 1:2 Look at Paul's greeting in verse two: *"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

This was Paul's favourite greeting to those whose lives had been changed by the gospel, emphasizing God's grace in salvation and the peace we have with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now Paul Gets Personal: (Phil 1:3)

"I thank my God every time I remember you."

Paul thanks God for the Philippians every time he remembers them. Every remembrance, even just the mention of their names, brings a prayer of thanksgiving to God from Paul's lips.

Why? Paul thanks God, because it is God who began this good work in them. It is God who brought them to salvation, and so Paul is supremely thankful.

What a marvelous testimony as to how we should view each other.

Thanking God for each other in the body of Christ.

When was the last time you thanked God for the people sitting in the pews next to you? Partnership turns "me" into "us" and "my" into "ours."

Paul Thanks God for the Philippians Every Time He Remembers Them.

“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.” Phil 1:4

Joy is a prominent theme in this letter, and here it is making its first appearance.

Paul is not only thankful for the Philippians when he prays for them, but he's filled with joy. And notice it's not in just some of his prayers. **It's in all of his prayers for all of them!**

Not occasionally—every time they cross his mind. In prison, Paul's memories aren't of hardship; they're of this faithful church, and it sparks gratitude to God.

From the moment the gospel came to Philippi, when Lydia opened her heart by the river, when the jailer believed after an earthquake. They prayed, sent money, stood with him in his trials. **That ongoing commitment filled Paul with joy.**

One of my favourite parts of the day is early morning when I pray for all the people of First Baptist. I thank God for each person He has brought to this church. I pray for your spiritual growth and development.

If there are specific prayer requests I know about for you or your family, I lift those up in prayer. It's a very special part of my day.

We Are All Partners in the Gospel Together (Phil.1:5)

Paul tells the Philippians he thanks God every time he remembers them, and that in all his prayers for all of them he always prays with joy. Then in verse 5.

“Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.” (Philippians 1:5)

Paul isn't saying the Philippians are nice supporters on the sidelines.

They are all partners in the gospel together.

God had started a good work in them. From the first day they received the gospel until the present time, they had joined with Paul as partners in the gospel.

To be partners in the gospel means to share in the saving benefits of the gospel in your life.

We're not solo Christians or spectators. We're a team, co-workers, united in one mission: advancing the gospel. Quote *“with one mind and one spirit striving together for the faith of the Gospel.”*

What Does This Partnership Look Like?

Financial Support: The Philippians were the only church to support Paul consistently. **Few means.**

Practical Support: They sent Epaphroditus to care for his needs. They identified with Paul in his "chains," publicly associating with him despite the risk of retribution.

Unified Mission: They weren't just "fans" of Paul; they were "players" on the same team.

Prayer and Spiritual Support: They engaged in fervent, ongoing prayer for the success of Paul's ministry.

Spreading The Gospel in Their Own City: Partnership was not only supporting Paul in his missionary travels but also living out the gospel at home.

It meant sharing, fellowship, joint participation, co-workers, teammates in the mission of spreading and living out the good news of Jesus.

God Began a Good Work in You When You Received Christ. (Phil 1:6)

"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus".

God began a good work in you when you received Christ. And he began a good work in me.

I would like verse 6 to be our memory verse for this week: "*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.*" (Philippians 1:6)

God isn't just "fixing" us; He is "re-creating" us. This work includes our character, our ministry, and our hope. Even when the **"work"** feels like pruning or discipline, it is fundamentally good.

The "good work" starts the moment we say yes to Jesus. Salvation isn't just a ticket to heaven, it's God transforming us from the inside out. He will finish the good work He started in us.

He regenerates us, gives us new life, seals us with His Spirit. That good work is salvation, sanctification, growth in Christlikeness. **And here's the good part!**

God doesn't start projects and abandon them. He finishes what He starts.

Paul is confident of this, he is "fully persuaded." He is confident that God will finish this good work that He began in the Philippians.

If We Are Believers Then God Has Good Works for Us to Do. Ephesians 2:10 says that "*We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*"

God began a good work in us when we received Christ. **You don't just receive Christ and walk away.** God who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is an ongoing process. **You don't just receive Christ, then do nothing,** and then you are suddenly perfected when you go to heaven.

No, God is working in us every day to make us more like Christ. And He has good works for us to do – works of love and grace and mercy for others.

He has a purpose for us that He will fulfill. He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion from the first day, every day, until Christ returns.

How Does God Complete His Work in Us?

The "good work" Paul refers to is sanctification—the process of becoming more like Christ in character and action.:

Sanctification has to do with the present. God is continuing the good work He began in us when we were saved. He completes this through several practical avenues.

The Power of the Holy Spirit: God doesn't just give us a rulebook; He provides internal "machinery" and produces fruit that replaces old habits. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Trials that Refine Us: Like a sculptor using a chisel, God uses trials to **"finish"** our character.

The Word of God: Scripture acts as the blueprint. It corrects, trains, and equips the believer so they are *"thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:17)

Obedience That Grows Us:

The Guarantee of the Work ("He will complete it") Phil 1:6

He Who Began a Good Work

God Will Finish the Work

Philippians 1:6 is one of the most encouraging **"construction"** promises in the Bible. It suggests that God is not a distracted builder; He finishes every project He starts.

God is not a hobbyist who starts projects and leaves them half-finished in the garage. He is the Master Craftsman. What He starts He means to bring to its intended goal.

You may feel like a "work in progress," messy, unfinished, and full of errors. **Verse 6 tells us that God's reputation is on the line.** He doesn't abandon His masterpieces.

Do you ever get discouraged in your spiritual progress? Praise God – **He's not finished yet!**

The same God who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

I like what Ruth Graham said. She said, "I saw a sign on a strip of highway once that I would like to have copied on my gravestone. It said, 'End of construction. Thank you for your patience.'" (Ruth Bell Graham;

God Is Also Completing the Good Work He Began in the Church.

God is not only completing the good work He began in you. He is also completing the good work He began in the church.

Paul's words in Philippians 1:3-6 certainly apply to individual believers, **but it would be a mistake to think they only apply to individuals.** This promise isn't just individual, it's corporate.

The same God who saves and grows us is building His church These words were originally addressed to the church at Philippi. God had begun a good work there, and Paul was confident that God would complete the good work that He had begun.

You're not a project God gave up on. You're His masterpiece in progress. When you feel stuck or unworthy, remember: the same God who saved you is committed to completing you. **And He's doing the same in our church.**

So today, thank God for your brothers and sisters here. Pray for them with joy.

Partner actively in the gospel. And rest in this promise: He who began a good work in you—and in us—will carry it to completion.

God began a good work here at First Baptist Church over 150 years ago. **And you know what? He is still working. He's not finished yet.**

He has more work for us to do, more people to come to Christ, more missions for us to support, more individuals and families to reach, more spiritual growth for us as a church.

God who began a good work here at First Baptist will carry it on to completion.

Despite our flaws, divisions, or slow progress, God is at work completing what He started in this body. The gospel partnership we share is part of that ongoing work.

Do you believe it? I do! Because God what God starts, He finishes.

We can get discouraged as a church when we don't see the numerical growth we would like to see. But God's not finished yet. And He's faithful to complete the work He began in you and in me and in First Baptist. **Verse 6 is our anchor:**

God is writing a story through us, and He is the one holding the pen. He started it, He's sustaining it, **and He—most certainly—will finish it.**

The Timeline: Until the Day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6)

The "day of Christ Jesus" is when Jesus returns—our full glorification, when we're completely like Him, free from sin.

Our partnership and God's work have an expiration date: The Day of Christ. This keeps us from "arrival syndrome." We never "**get there**" in this life. We are in a state of continuous improvement until we see Jesus face to face and our work is finally done.

We are called to be more than spectators of the Gospel; we are called to be stockholders in it.

Trust the Process: If you feel discouraged by your growth, remember Verse 6.

Value the People: If you feel lonely in your walk, look to your partners in the pews.

Some Truths to Remember As We Close:

Truth number one: all believers are called saints.

Truth number two: we are all partners in the gospel together.

Truth number three: God began a good work in you when you received Christ.

Truth number four: God will finish the good work He started in you.

Philippians 1:6 Let's pray.