

Global Missions in Biblical Perspective
Leading the Nations to Jesus
“3 Lessons from a Missionary Letter to a Missionary Supporting Church”
Philippians 1
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This is God’s Word, inspired, inerrant and infallible. Philippians 1:3–8 says [3] *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, [4] always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, [5] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. [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. [7] It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. [8] For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This past week has been a great week with our missions conference going on. One of the things that really blessed my wife and I this past week was getting to hear from the missionaries, and not only was I challenged and encouraged by what they were doing, how the Lord was working in their life and what He was doing through them but I immediately went back to those things I give thanks to the Lord for. I give thanks to the Lord for our missions pastor, for this ever growing global missions team and I know when I hear missionaries on mission, on message and in the right ministries, it is in their hearts and that we get the opportunity to get into their life because of the leadership of our global missions team. They faithfully use that Biblical paradigm.

We’re committed to the Great Commission and if you’re committed to the Great Commission then you have one message to give to people. That message is that God is glorified in the preeminence of His Son Jesus Christ as He is proclaimed as the One who has created us, the One who alone can save us and the One who intercedes to sustain us. This glorious message that He saves sinners from their sin is the only message we have. It has multiple implications and a comprehensive world and life view that is attended to it. It is a singular message of how a man who is wrong with God can be right with God. The failure of all man-made religion is obvious but the glorious truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is delightful, extraordinary, life changing and transforming.

Our mission is to get this Gospel message to all the nations. Christ has given us the mission. Christ has established the message and Christ has given us the ministries. How do you do this? We don’t have to wonder and that’s why it’s one of the reasons He put the book of Acts in the Bible. When the Gospel went out we see that Paul and the team he had did four things. In city after city after city they did Gospel evangelism and discipleship, Gospel church planting and revitalization, Gospel deeds of love and mercy and Gospel development and deployment of leaders. This is always before us so that we know who God would have us engage with.

I’m taking time to explain this because of stewardship. I think God’s money is important. I think the time of God’s people is important. We only have 24 hours in a day and only so many days on this earth. So when you spend time in the world missions time at

Briarwood I want to make sure we're on mission, on message and in ministry and I thank God for a team that keeps us in that direction.

Secondly, as God's people have prayed about what to give sacrificially beyond the tithe as He brings it into our lives we can see what God is doing with those gifts. The reason my wife and I give most of our faith promise to missions is because we know there is a Global missions team praying for our missionaries, holding them accountable and is constantly at work with them so I know we are making what we give count to what God has given. They are in the right ministries, doing the right thing to fulfill the Great Commission as they are on mission, on message and in ministry. I know that this doesn't happen without leadership and that's why I share this with you. This kind of stewardship gives me confidence in my giving.

So in this study I want to look at what I call a missionary letter and that is the book of Philippians. It has three prisms to it. I know that there are other significant themes that run through this letter but here is a local church with a missionary named Paul who writes to them to let them know he received their gift, the people they sent and has heard about the things happening with them and now he wants to give them a report. If you want to learn how to write a support letter to a missionary supporting church then read Philippians.

This prism also gives insight into a heart of a missionary. Listen to some of these words of Paul. Philippians 1:20 says [20] ***It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.*** Philippians 3:14 says [14] ***I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*** Philippians 3:10–11 says [10] ***(I want to) know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*** [11] ***that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*** Here is a profile of a missionary as hear Paul's heart as he shares this with his missionary supporting church and here is a missionary supporting church.

Philippians 1:5 says [5] ***because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.*** This is the only church that Paul let be a supporting church in his ministry. Secondly, this church had supported him from the very beginning. Do you know what the core group of the church at Philippi was when it started? It consisted of a converted jailer and his household, a servant girl who was demon possessed that people were making money off of and a business woman named Lydia who was there for a short period of time who was actually from Thyatira. From the very beginning of that church, according to Paul, they engaged in Gospel partnership with Paul. In this letter many times he says 'you all' and the reason because the church was a missionary supporting church was because the members of Philippi had engaged in it – you all. Paul prays for them to stay healthy as a church.

All through this letter it is so refreshing to see how concerned Paul is that Philippi stay on mission, on message and in ministry. He wants them to have stability and we see this when he tells them to 'be anxious for nothing.' He wants them to have this anticipation as we see him tell them 'it has been granted unto you not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake.' He wants them to have confidence in the Lord. He wants them to know that the life in Christ is pervasive and comprehensive.

When Jesus goes to the cross He pays for all the sins of all of His people and He gives us all of His righteousness to clothe us. He gives us a new heart, a new record, a new life and now we give Him all. We don't give Him just part of our life but all of our life. Praise God for the Lord's Day but He doesn't just get that day, He gets every day. Praise God that not only does Jesus migrate up to the top of the list in our life because He is our Lord and Savior but He is the

list. Paul is telling us that He is not only to be at the top of the list in a healthy Christian and a healthy church but He is the list. Philippians 1:21a says *[21a] For to me to live is Christ...* Jesus is the One who makes our list. He is the One who tells us what it means to be a father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife, grandfather, grandmother, friend, to walk with the Lord, to fulfill your calling, etc. He gives you the ability to live this out for Him. This is what is in Paul's heart and that's what he is communicating to this church.

Paul also gives us insight into what Gospel partnership with a missionary is like for a missionary supporting church. In this letter Paul identifies three things about a missionary supporting church that reveals their partnership in the Gospel with him as a Gospel missionary and we include these things on our faith promise cards as well as people consider what God wants them to give. We have designed our cards to match up with what Paul says here about a partnership church with missionaries. What Paul does they participate in and do as they are partners with him in this Gospel ministry to take the Gospel to all the world. Here are the three life takeaways he identifies for them.

The first one is that they are personally engaged. Philippians 2:25–26 says *[25] I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, [26] for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.* Paul is telling us that Epaphroditus has been with him as a fellow soldier, missionary, servant and has worked alongside of him in this short term mission's trip. Now Epaphroditus is going to go home back to Philippi. Philippi had sent one of their own persons, who engaged in this short term mission's trip, as he joined Paul in his mission and ministry so much so that Paul owns him like they own him but it's time to send him home. How did he get to Paul? Here is a person who was sent by persons in that church to be engaged with Paul and then sent back. That's just one but I want to show you at least one more.

Philippians 4:2–3 says *[2] I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. [3] Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.* He wants these two women to resolve their issues because they have labored with Paul in the Gospel and they had both been sent from the church at Philippi to assist the team. Here is another example of personal engagement that Paul reveals to us that has happened. He affirms it and declares his appreciation for it. All of them were engaged in the partnership. Secondly, there some from those who were sent to Paul for short term mission's support of him in ministry.

Here is the second takeaway and second mark of partnership and that is to be prayerfully engaged. This is all over the book of Philippians but for the sake of time we're just going to look at one text. Philippians 1:15–21 says *[15] Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. [16] The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. [17] The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. [18] What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.*

Yes, and I will rejoice, [19] for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, [20] as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. [21] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul is mainly concerned that Jesus is preached and we see in this passage that some were teaching under different pretenses. We know here that Paul is in prison and that he knows there is a possibility it could end in a death sentence because he is committed to telling people that Jesus loves them, died for their sins and they can have eternal life if they will come to Christ. For Paul whether by life or death Christ will not be put to shame. The positive is that Christ will be exalted in his life and in his death. Then Paul tells the Philippians to keep praying because he knows he can't do this without the power of the Holy Spirit. God has entwined the presence and power of His Holy Spirit upon His people with the prayers of His people for one another. God is not dependent upon my praying but God has designed His work of the Spirit of God to be engaged with my praying.

I really want you to pray about how you can be personally engaged in mission work. One way we are all personally engaged is that we're all missionaries. Not all of us are called to be cross cultural missionaries so if you're not called to do this don't go out of guilt for this is a calling, but we're all called to be missionaries where we are. Jesus says John 20:21, [21] *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* There is probably nothing more encouraging than to know the people that are praying and supporting are doing what they are doing where they are.

Here at Briarwood if God blesses our faith promises giving the Lord will have given us 25 short term mission trips this year. That is another way you can get personally involved. Many of those will involve students who will be introduced to not only serving Christ but to serving Christ in the lives of others in other cultures. Another way to get involved is being a part of our Global missions team and it's broken into committees that serve different parts of the world that are supporting, encouraging and praying. Maybe God has gifted you to be a sender where you are a part of the infrastructure of what is going to be done out on the field and how God will use you in their lives.

There are so many ways to be prayerfully involved as well. Some will just pray through the complete list of missionaries by name on a regular basis. Some will take a particular area of the world and pray for those serving in that area throughout the year. Each week we display a flag from a different country where our church supports missionaries in that country and some will pray each week for those serving in that particular country. Get engaged prayerfully so that we can be a true partnership church as a missionary supporting church.

The third takeaway and final mark of a missionary supporting church is that we are financially engaged. I can't tell you how important it was for me in October of 1972 to not only get the tithe straight where I quit robbing God of what was His, but then to start praying about offerings – mercy offerings and faith promise offerings. At this time in my life I was attending a private college, with a wife, a child and three part time jobs. So we started after giving our tithe with 25 cents a week to give to missions. At that time for me that was a big deal but then God just burst loose with us. God changed everything for us that not only did those amounts go up but the percentages went up. This is what I love about this time of faith promise because it gives us the opportunity to pray 'God, what are You going to bring to us that we promise to give to You?'

Some are wondering how to do this and others already know what God is having them to faith promise. Here is how my wife and do this. I looked in the Old Testament. When God did something there were free will offerings, love offerings, supernatural provision and sacrifice so that's what we do every year when we pray through this. What are we planning on doing this year that we can sacrifice to give to the Lord? What can we do systematically on a percentage basis to get beyond the tithe and keep adding? You can't out give God and God will not be a

debtor to any man. With the tithe I'm being obedient but faith promise (offerings) is when I'm giving. The last is supernatural where I say 'God how are you going to plunder the Egyptians to send me something this year?

When Israel went out from Egypt they were going to build a tabernacles with gold, silver and purple in the wilderness and where did that come from? On their way out the Egyptians just threw stuff at them and said 'would you all just leave, here take this and go.' Then I tell God that I promise if You get it to me it will get through me. That is what faith promise is all about and I love it. Everyone can get in on this thing so that we're a partnership church. Let me show you in the text about being financially engaged.

Philippians 4:10–20 says *[10] I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. [11] Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. [12] I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. [13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

[14] Yet it was kind of you to share (partner) my trouble. [15] And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. [16] Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. [17] Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. [18] I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. [19] And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. [20] To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

In other words, it's amazing what God will send to you if He knows it will get through you. It doesn't get sent to us for us but it gets sent to us to go through us. God entrusts these things to us that we commit to Him. They started out as a missionary supporting church. They continued, revived and renewed their commitment and would give the gifts to the Apostle Paul even while he was in prison. They are supporting him even as he is engaging in it.

There is a world out there that needs to hear about Jesus. We have people who are ready to go do the right mission with the right message in the right ministries. I would love for all of us to participate in being a Gospel partnership church. I guess the best way I can illustrate this is through an account I was reading recently about Andrew Fuller. He started at the conclusion of the first great awakening at the anticipation of the second great awakening.

In 1792 Fuller began a missionary sending agency where he called pastors of Gospel churches who wanted to be faithful to the Great Commission to take the Gospel to all the nations. Jesus is not the tribal God of America, Jesus is Lord of Lords, King of Kings and Lord of all the nations so to all the nations we send the very glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. Fuller couldn't get many churches to agree to it but there was a small group of them and they sent a young man on what today we'd call a vision trip.

This young man went to India and when he saw what paganism was doing to their lives, the fact that they were perishing and headed to a Christ less eternity he came back and Fuller said to him 'why don't you go back and stay.' I almost feel that this hymn *Rescue the Perishing* was written for that moment for the words are;

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave*

*Weep o'er the erring, one lift up the fallen
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.
Rescue the perishing, care for the dying
Jesus is merciful Jesus will save.*

I sung that hymn so many times growing up in my local church. Fuller said to William Carey “Go back Carey” and Carey said to Fuller “I will go down, if you’ll hold the rope.” A rope has two ends and a missionary has to know the power of the Gospel of grace to hold on to that end and tie it around others so they can be rescued with the Gospel. Sending churches hold the rope by being personally engaged, prayerfully engaged and financially engaged and our God shall supply all that we need to serve Him.

That is what God has called us to do – hold the rope to rescue the perishing. Jesus will save. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Take a few moments in silent prayer. As you consecrate to Him what you sense He is telling you to give ask God to multiply it. Commit it to Him. Commit to a prayer strategy to pray for missionaries. Ask God what He wants to get to you to get through you as well and He will supply that as you give it to Him, not to gain from Him but that others may gain His Son Jesus. That’s all we want to hear back – giving and receiving – to receive back the message from those to whom we support, pray and engage with. People who need the Lord come to the Lord. Help us to be faithful Lord, I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

Life Takeaways

- I. Personally Engaged
- II. Prayerfully Engaged
- III. Financially Engaged