



Separated from Your Group of Christian Friends

Bible verses: Philippians 1:3-11

I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right that I should think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart, you who are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Ask everyone in the group to have their Bibles with them. Ask one person to read the passage out loud. Encourage them to have their pens and to underline things that strike them, especially later in the Bible when you go through the key words and phrases. Also, encourage them to make notes.

After the reading of the passage is complete, explain the context.

Context:

Philippi was a city in northeastern Greece and around the year 50 AD, St. Paul visited that city. He preached there; he won some converts, and he started a Christian community there. Years later, St. Paul wrote this letter to them. But Paul wasn't with another group of Christians when he wrote this letter. He was isolated from all of the communities that he started and the friends he had made because he was in prison.

The current thought among Scripture scholars is that Paul wrote this letter in 55 AD, five years after he first went to Philippi. Most likely, he was in prison in Ephesus and was almost 400 miles away from Philippi. But this was not a city that he only visited once, preached the gospel, made some converts, put someone else in charge, and then went on to another town. Evidence indicates that Paul made several visits to Philippi and that he made real and lasting friendships there. That is why he begins his letter to them in this way. Keep this in mind as we hear the passage again.

After explaining the context, ask some to read the passage to the group again. When the reader has finished, go back through and highlight the key words and phrases found below.

Key Words and Phrases:

- *Joy*: Found in verse 4, the Greek word is "charas". It is the root of the word "cheerful".

- *Heart*: Found in verse 7, the Greek word is “kardia”. It indicates the center of one’s being.
- *Affection*: Found in verse 8, the Greek word is “splanchnois” (SPLACK-nois). It is the root of the word “spleen”. Affection is not simply warm feelings. It indicates feeling and emotion at the deepest level.
- *Love*: Found in verse 9, the Greek word is “agape” (a-GAH-pay). Paul could have used the word “philos” (FEE-loas) which mean brotherly love. Instead, he uses the word “agape” which is the deepest love that there is, an unbreakable bond.
- *Pure and blameless*: Found in verse 10, the Greek phrase is “eilikrineis kai aproskopoi”. “Eilikrineis” (AISLE-ee-kree-nice) expresses the Greek idea “to be tested by sun light”. They used this phrase to indicate sincerity. “Aproskopoi” (AH-prosk-uh-poy) means “free from harm”.

Now you may provide the following interpretation.

Interpretation:

Paul is using language that can best be described as a sign of heartache. This can best be seen in verse 8 where he says that he longs to be with them. He actually talks about his ache to be with the Christians in Philippi more than he talks about any physical pain or hunger he has from being in prison. Even though he is describing heartache, he is remaining cheerful as he prays for them. He doesn’t wallow in despair. Instead, he is cheerful. He reaches out to this group of friends and he also lets them know that his thoughts about them leads him to pray for them. Later in the passage he describes what he is praying for. He wants them to continue to grow in holiness. He wants them to be single hearted for God and for them to become more righteous.

Now you may lead a discussion using the following guide.

Application to Real Life:

- While we are not in prison like St. Paul, we all are certainly far more restricted than normal. What is the hardest part of what you’re living through right now?
- What is it like to be separated from your friends, right now? Can you relate to St. Paul’s heartache? What do you miss most?
- What do you think will be your biggest obstacle to growing closer to God during this time?
- St. Paul used his time in prison to write and to pray. How can you use this time to reach out to friends? How can you use this time to get closer to God?

- St. Paul tells about how he was praying for those that he was separated from. How can the group pray for you right now?

Closing Prayer:

Ask someone else to read the pass for a final time and then pray the following prayer.

God, our Father, St. Paul's love for the Christian community grew stronger even though he was in prison and separated from them. During this time of separation, may our love for our group of disciples increase. May our love of you increase and may our relationship with you grow stronger. We pray all these things through Jesus your Son and in communion with the Holy Spirit. Amen.