



**Series: Philippians: Growing in Christ**

**Date: May 29, 2022**

**Speaker: Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor**

**Text: Philippians 1:1-11**

**Title: Growing in Christ**

This was a hard week. More heavy news than most of us feel our hearts can handle. I had a really good time in God's word this week precisely because I went to it with the weighty-ness of all this news. I went to God needy. How do I shepherd our church, what do I say & not say and how much room to make for it? It's Memorial Day weekend but man a real tragedy occurred too. AND there was some dark stuff revealed in our denomination of churches. What do I do with it all?

And all I can tell you is I was met by the hope of heaven. What this day needs is hope. Hope of a day with no more pain. No more tears. No more shootings. No more abuse. No more scandals. No more death. In the midst of present pain, there is hope. And we are going to talk about that hope as we go into this new series we begin today.

### **Introduction**

If you have your bible, get it out and make your way over to the New Testament book of Philippians. This new sermon series through Philippians will take us right up to July 4 weekend.

Philippians is an especially important book to me. God used this short letter during a very difficult time in my life and brought about one of the greatest spiritual breakthroughs I've ever experienced. I was a new dad and battling intense anxiety. Had panic attacks and at one point where I could think of nothing else to do, I just sat down & opened my bible. Kind of just opened it to a random page and said OK God what do you have for me. I don't recommend this as a bible reading plan. BUT in that panic drenched moment I didn't know what else to do but knew God's word was living and active. SO, I opened it up and it was to Philippians.

And I discovered a letter brimming with joy and confidence and HOPE. And I wanted that. Now this is not a series on anxiety or depression or self-doubt. Instead, it's a series on discovering & growing in the joy & confidence & hope that God offers you in Christ. And as you grow in Christ, you will experience God's breakthrough power in your life. And I really don't know how else to say this, but I am hopeful that as we





open our minds and hearts to this letter God will bring some breakthroughs.

In fact, our whole series is themed after this idea of growing in Christ because that's the whole book of Philippians. Our writer, the apostle Paul, is going to encourage the Philippian church to keep growing. There is MORE for them in Christ than what they've experienced so far.

When you decide to really live for Jesus, I have great news - he is going to change you. He's gonna grow you up. You realize that's God's plan for you. You continue walking with Jesus you won't be the same person you are today. Like that alone should make you STICK like glue to this book. Because there is an old as time brand of Christianity that is transactional. I say a prayer, you forgive my sins. And THAT'S IT. Listen you don't GROW in that kind of belief system. Jesus isn't looking for customers. He doesn't have customers. He's growing his followers. So, if you've been a Christian a long time but not seen change, maybe you've just been a customer. And since Jesus actually doesn't have customers...it's no wonder you've had an empty experience with Jesus. It's time to grow up in Christ. As a follower. As a disciple.

God will grow you up into somebody who is loving like Jesus, compassionate like Jesus, wise like Jesus, patient like Jesus, intentional like Jesus. Empowered from on high like Jesus.

Cause see when you decide yes, I'm choosing Jesus...When you live for him, he lives in you, and he grows you up. HE does the work. And he never stops. He's growing you Always. Until the day you die. That's what you need. Hope that you will not always battle FEAR & worry. That you will not always battle need for approval. You will not always battle addiction. That you will not always battle lust. GOD is going to grow you more into the image of Jesus. That's what you need. That's what your family needs. They need to see more of Jesus and God has put you there, but you can't grow by being his customer.

And what this world needs right now is some growing Jesus followers who can represent the love of God and the hope of heaven in all this darkness around us. So today we open our letter and look at how to grow in Christ. Read through it and just observe what God has for us, then come back and show you how we grow.

### **1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus:**

First thing you see, this is a letter. That's going to matter a lot for how we preach through this. Even though this book is only 4 chapters...because of its nature we'll have to go through it a little slower than we did Exodus. That's because exodus is a narrative. Telling about events that happened. A letter like this is largely instructional. Telling us about the gospel and its implications for life. I want you to immerse yourself in it this



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summer because I'm telling you every verse will be packed with stuff for you. So cool. ok...

Paul is the author and timothy is like his scribe. Writing this stuff down for him. Timothy was in many ways like a spiritual son to Paul and he is going to say as much in chapter 2. Timothy was also with Paul when they first planted the church in Philippi so they would recognize his name.

At the time of the writing Paul is in Prison in Rome awaiting trial for preaching the gospel. So, he's sending this letter to convey his hopes for them in case he doesn't get there in person again. And he calls himself and timothy "servants of Christ Jesus." Literally slaves. Already in the opening salutation you see to live is Christ, to die is gain. Makes sense. He's not a customer of Jesus. He's a follower. More than that, he's a servant. He's bound to Jesus. Is that you?

**To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.**

OK Let's talk about the Philippian church for a second. This is the first church ever planted in Europe. The apostle Paul and timothy and a guy named Luke and a few others sailed from modern day turkey over to the port city of neapolis and then made their way to the main city in the region. Philippi. And Luke tells us what happens while they are there.

The first person they meet...the first convert to Christ on the European continent...was a woman named Lydia. She ran her own small business. Shout out to our women living for Jesus in the marketplace. Acts 16.14 says they shared the gospel, and the Lord opened her heart and she believed.

Immediately after she believes she gets baptized. That is your first step as a servant of Christ. You get baptized. We've got somebody getting baptized today in fact. And if you haven't taken that step that is your next step, and we want to celebrate with you.

Ok so after Lydia gets saved, Paul & the crew get thrown in jail for healing a girl who had an evil spirit that allowed her to see the future. Owners didn't like their source of income was gone so they jailed them. We don't know if she became a believer or not. Most say yes of course she did. But no certainty.

In Jail, they start singing and preaching to prisoners. Because he's a follower of Jesus. Everywhere Jesus went he preached the good news. And God causes an earthquake that makes the chains fall off and the jail doors open. Jailer sees this, gets ready to kill himself because he knows the prisoners have escaped and to his joy hears Paul say WAIT...we are all here. The Jailer can't believe it. What kind of people stay when they could run? Jesus people. And the Jailer says, "sirs what must I do to be saved?" He gives his life to Jesus and gets baptized.



I'm telling you this is not the strategy I learned as a church planter. Starts off familiar. Lydia makes sense to me. But then - exorcize a demon, get thrown in jail & lead jailer to faith. Boom. church plant. Since Paul left, they've raised up deacons and elders to lead the church. That's the Philippian church. And the reason I spend 5 minutes on that is that as we go through this letter, remember the people reading it were people. With stories. Whose lives had been totally changed by God's grace through Jesus. And they are growing up as disciples of Jesus. The jailer, Lydia, and the rest are growing up as they follow Jesus.

**2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace are available from God the father through Jesus to those who believe. Paul likes to remind them that he wants that for them. He hopes the Lord brings these fruits of the gospel into their lives.

**3** I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you,<sup>[a]</sup> **4** always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, **5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

See the occasion for Paul sending this letter is that they had sent him a gift in prison, and he's really encouraged. This is basically his favorite church he's planted. Read the letters and

you'll see this one stands out. Overflowing with affection. Read the Corinthian letter and Paul is like man ya'll are the most messed up church in the world (technically true at the time) what is happening over there. He loves this church and so he prays thanksgiving for them. You know you can pray to God prayers of thanksgiving? You don't just always have to ask him for stuff. You can just be thankful for his blessings. Thankful for friendships...even ones where friends have moved away like Paul had. And you can pray for other people with JOY. Why joy? Because when he thought of them, he couldn't help but think of how they were fellow servants of Christ. They got it. So of course, they partnered with him in the gospel. That word partnership is actually the Greek word "koinonia." It's not a transactional term. It's a relational term. It means fellowship. It means unity.

See they did partner with him financially. They supported the work of church planting. But that was an overflow of their fellowship they shared in Christ. I love that. I want that kind of fellowship here. Where deep unity with one another in Christ overflows in partnership in the advancement of the gospel. I see that in you already by the way. It's how we are going to keep planting churches in the years ahead! Through our fellowship in Christ.

**6** I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you<sup>[b]</sup> will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.



Ok this is like a favorite verse of scripture for me. Because it has layers, and it has a lot of hope. Paul talks about the hope of heaven often in his writing as “the day of Christ Jesus.”

See Paul is recalling what Jesus said to his disciples. That one day, a day no one can predict...The risen Jesus is going to return as the triumphant Jesus. Riding on the clouds of heaven in power and glory and a trumpet will sound and his angels will gather his followers across the globe and bring them to him. And on that day - we will be with all those who have already died and gained Christ in heaven. Remember the hope of heaven? No more...

And Paul is saying from this day right now...until THAT day...God is going to keep working a good work in you and through you. Man, I hope that gives some of you some encouragement today. Who is the actor? It is the Lord!! HE who started a good work in you.

You didn't decide to turn your life around and start living for him. HE decided to turn your heart around. He began it. He will continue it. Some of you are trying so hard to live for Christ and I applaud it. BUT I hope you will find some peace that you can do nothing without him. BUT as Paul says in chapter 4 - you CAN do all things through him who strengthens you. You CAN have compassion for others even when you feel tapped out. Because he's the one working. He started it and you better be sure he will carry it. He's never

taking his hand off the wheel. He's never taking a day off. He's never going to be tired. Never run out of patience. Never slip up. Never burst out in anger at you. He's working! So, rest in him as you follow him. Come to me all who are weary & heavy laden. My yoke is easy my burden is light.

**7** Indeed, it is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart,<sup>[c]</sup> and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. **8** For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

He loves them. It's good for him who is forever bound to them because of the ministry they began together to keep them in his heart.

Can I pause here and say something in the middle of this...this is how I feel about you Mercy Church. It's good for a pastor to love his church. That when he thinks about his church, it brings a warm smile of affection across his soul. We are still growing up for sure. And I'm no apostle Paul. Lord knows I've fumbled this lead pastor thing several times. But here's the reality of present day - 50% of pastors don't make it 5 years. 80% don't make it 10. 90% quit before retirement. If you don't know any retired pastors that's why. That's because the relationship between pastor & church is so weighty on both ends. But you Mercy church have shown me mercy. You have been incredible partners in the gospel. And I love being your



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pastor. I'm glad I don't have Paul's assignment who kept planting & moving on. I like seeing the fruit God is bearing over time here. I'm not super great at syrupy moments but wanted to say that. Now here is what Paul prays for the Philippian church. Here's what he's asking God for:

**9 And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment,**

What I love about this prayer is that he doesn't just pray for knowledge to grow. He prays for love to GROW THROUGH growth in knowledge and discernment.

See this is the main way you know if you are growing in Christ. The sort of subtitle of our series is "Growing in Christ." And the evidence of truly growing as a follower of Jesus is...is your love increasing? Love for what? God & People.

This is why our mission as a church is to make disciples who LOVE God and Love Each Other and Love our world. Do I want you to learn? YES! Man, I love learning and the wonderful thing about the scriptures is that there is always more to learn. **BUT - knowledge isn't the goal. LOVE is. Knowledge without love leads to PRIDE and harshness.** It will lead you to look down on those who don't know what you know. That's not the way of Christ. Jesus says the way the world will know you are my disciples - John 13, 15, 17 - is your LOVE. LOVE is the final apologetic for the gospel. Not knowledge.

And then Discernment - is wisdom. It's the ability to see & understand the world around you through the lens of the bible and make sense of it. But that discerning is also done in love. Not judging others but having the compassion of Christ on them while also not compromising truth. A powerful Christ-like love.

Why does Paul want their love of God and others to grow in knowledge and discernment?

**10 so that you may approve the things that are superior and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ,**

Here's the deal - the more they grow in love the more they will be able to see and live God's way. Approve things that are superior means to know what is best. Paul is not saying between good and bad. But between good and best. He wants them to grow in love that is informed by knowledge and discernment so they will be able to choose the BEST way to express love to one another.

So, they will be pure and blameless in the day of Christ. Day of Christ again. Here he is talking about them together. And he's using the language he uses in his letter to the Ephesians to talk about the Church as the bride of Christ. Pure and blameless.

See he wants their love to grow in such a way that they will continue to look more and more worthy of Jesus. More and

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more like Jesus. Until the day it meets Jesus face to face. Pretty powerful. And only Christ-motivated love can do that.

**11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.**

Paul incorporates one of his favorite metaphors to paint a picture of what we are to grow into together. A fruitful orchard. Fruit takes time to grow and can only grow through Christ. But as we devote ourselves to him, he starts to bear fruit. Psalm 1.

### **How we grow up in Christ**

**God does the work, so go to him** (v.6)

We need to get a lot more familiar with daily dependence on God. I think our independence and self-sufficiency stifles spiritual growth. There is a desire in us to figure out the formula for growth and then run the play so we can do it ourselves. Little prayer little bible little giving BOOM. growth. Problem is apart from Christ we can do nothing. Paul says at one point to the Corinthians that he planted, Apollos watered...but GOD gave the growth to that church. If we are going to grow it is through humble desperate dependence on God. Daily. Give us this day our daily bread. TODAY. We need you TODAY.

God, I need you today. God I am dependent today. Thank you that you do the work. Would you do the work in my heart and in my mind today? All the fruits of the spirit - I can't strain them into existence. No, I have to come to you for that.

**Take a step in the gospel fellowship of the local church**

Paul has seen the evidence of the Holy Spirit alive in this church through their fellowship with one another and with him. They are bound together in their celebration of who they are in Christ. See the same thing that unites us celebration of baptism is the same thing that unites us around the communion table. That same thing...the love of God for us...unites us in mission. This is the nature of true gospel movements. A group of people grow in their love for God together and they get excited about others joining in on it. They want others to have what they have. That's gospel partnership. I'll pray I'll give I'll go so that others can have what I have in this gospel fellowship. I'm telling you man that's contagious.

**Don't live for yourself** - Theme of city project this summer. What is your next step? For real just write it out as a prayer. God, show me my next step in gospel fellowship. And see what he unlocks through that prayer. Could be membership here at Mercy. Could be like Paul and God is going to send you somewhere where the gospel hasn't been heard. Could be committing to tithing and you've never done that. I've heard



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so many testimonies of people having breakthroughs with God once they started giving financially to his mission. That's not prosperity gospel.

### Get to know God

As we step out into summer together this weekend can I encourage you to spend your summer getting to know God? Paul prays their love will grow in knowledge and discernment. As they get more familiar with God...as they get to know God...they will grow in their love. They will grow in the wisdom needed to follow God in this age. I want to encourage you to get to know God. But remember he's a relational God. So, get to know him by spending time with him. Yes, read your bible. And spend time with him in prayer. Read Philippians with us. This summer. You could legitimately read this letter every day. Even if you read a chapter a day that's still going to be 12 times reading through it over 7 weeks.

**Go to him, take a step with him, and get to know him.**

**Not as a customer, but as a follower.**



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