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Partners in the Gospel
Philippians 1:3-11
September 18, 2016, Jeff Germo

Did you know that on any given Sunday at CRBC there are more than 75 people who volunteer their time and energy to serve in various ways? Many of them are quite visible, such as the **Worship Team** at the front, and the **Welcome Team** that greets you at the door, and the **ushers** who collect the offering. But many others are more behind the scenes. There is a huge team of workers in **Christ Kids** teaching the children. There are those who **prepare the coffee** for the Welcome Team. There is the **sound technician** up in the balcony, and the techie running the **computer**. The people up in the A/V booth are usually not noticed at all because they work hard at running things so seamlessly. There are **people who count the offering**. We have people working in the **nursery**. We have a **prayer team** that meets every Sunday morning before the service to pray specifically for the service that nothing would distract from what God wants to do in our hearts on that Sunday. And on the first Sunday of the month we **have those who prepare communion and those who serve** it. We have someone in the **library** each Sunday. We also have **teams going to the seniors' homes** to minister to people who can't get out to a church service here, so they bring church to them.

And that's just on Sunday. We also have someone who has been coming in every Wednesday for many years to refill the **communication cards** and things like that in the pews. During the week we have a large team of people serving in our family ministry on Wednesdays called Power House. We have a team that cares for **single moms**. We have a team that does **visitation** to those in our community who need a visit. Your **church board** meets at least monthly, and deals with the business of the church. We have a large team of people who volunteer with the **Youth** and the **Young Adults** ministries on Thursdays and Tuesdays. We have people who volunteer by looking after our **gardens**.

We have people serving in hospitality who organize our potlucks and various social events at the church. We have a couple teams, and one more forming very soon, who go to various locations in the city to minister to kids and families by putting on our **River Kids Sidewalk Sunday School** for them so they can introduce them to Jesus. We also have a team that goes and ministers to kids and families at one of our inner city schools.

We also have a number of **Growth Groups** meeting throughout Campbell River, all of whom have people leading or hosting in their homes. In the Growth Groups we dig in to God's Word and ask the Holy Spirit to help us grow into the kinds of people who can love each other and God better. We have real sweet fellowship and care for each other. And there is usually food, which is a bonus.

Those are just the people involved in organized service at CRBC. There are also many people who give of their time, energy, and financial resources, but aren't involved in one of the official ministries of the church. You are being Christ with skin on to those God has put in your sphere of influence. You are loving the people around you. And there are probably some of you who are serving in various ways who I have missed this morning. But, you know what is beautiful. I don't hear anyone coming up to me and telling me they want to be recognized for what they are doing. As a matter of fact some of you are so very aware that you are doing it for the Lord that you feel uncomfortable being thanked.

When I think about all of these things my heart feels very full of love and joy. As a staff, we feel so blessed. You are all partnering with us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You are truly our heroes. I am not saying that lightly. Thank you all so much. You are involved in the mission Jesus gave us to make disciples by teaching them to obey everything he commanded us to do, which is to learn to love better. You are taking seriously your call to partner with us as the Holy Spirit transforms our characters into his likeness so his kingdom can be extended in Campbell River and around the world.

That is what this morning's passage is about. The Apostle Paul was overwhelmed by the love and partnership he had with the Philippian church and that love and joy spilled over into his letter to them.

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Philippians 1:3–11 (NLT)

³Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. ⁶And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

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⁷So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. ⁸God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

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⁹I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹⁰For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. ¹¹May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

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Now, there is way too much good meat here for us to chew and swallow adequately this morning, without choking. There is no way that I can do justice to all the details. That goes for almost any passage that we look at. It's important when you study a text of Scripture that you look for the big idea of what the writer, Paul, in this case, was getting at. Sometimes, if we try and look too closely at the details we can get sidetracked from the main point.

Paul wrote to the Philippian church. He was a real live historical person. And the Philippians were real live historical people. And one of our goals this morning is to find out what he was trying to communicate to them, which takes a little bit of work because we are only hearing one side of the conversation. It's like listening in on a phone conversation that someone is having. You can hear the person near you with the phone, but you have to guess about what is being said, or what is happening, on the other end.

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A couple weeks ago Ruthie was talking with her mother on the phone. I thought she was talking to someone else. The conversation made sense to me at first, but then the more they talked the more confused I became until she told me that it was her mother. When I found that out things became clear for me. That's how it is when we study the Bible. There is a bit of guess work that goes along with the study, but the more you know about the recipient of the letter, the more it makes sense.

As we noted last week, Paul had received a care package from the church in Philippi. They were concerned for him because he had been in prison for preaching the Gospel in Rome. This would have particularly hit home for them because when he initially planted the church at Philippi, ten years prior to this, it was started from some of the contacts he had made while in prison there. And now he is in prison again; this time in Rome. He's their spiritual father, and they care about him very much, so to express that concern they send Epaphroditus all the way from Philippi to Rome with a care package they put together for him.

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³ Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴ Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵ for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.

Even though the Church at Philippi is far from Paul geographically they are his partners in the Gospel. He's filled with thanksgiving and joy because of their partnership from the very first day he planted the church that grew out of his experience in jail in Philippi, ten years prior to this, until now while he is imprisoned in Rome. They have not ceased their hard work to extend God's kingdom in Philippi and beyond. And they have not stopped expressing their love in very practical ways.

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Paul calls them partners. Let's take a look at the word "**partners**" here. The Greek word is *koinonia*. Many of you are probably aware that it is often translated in English with the word, "fellowship". That's how the KJV translates it here, but that's not real helpful to us in twenty first century Canada. The word "fellowship" has a sort of a fluffy connotation for us. Coffee and snacks in the fellowship hall after church where we might talk about anything from politics to the hockey game on TV last night, or even sharing some juicy gossip.

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The Greek word has a fuller meaning than that. It means "**a joint-participation in a common interest and activity.**"¹ That's quite a bit different than how we use the word today. So, Paul was thanking the Philippians for their sacrificial gift which was given to further their common goal, which was the Gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus was their whole reason for existing as a church and as individuals.

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In verse 7 there is a similar word, *synkoinonoi*. It's an adjective that describes a partner, a sharer, or a participant. **The NLT uses the word "share"**, which is ok, but probably doesn't communicate the intent of the Greek word fully. We can share an idea, or a common theology, or philosophy, or belief. That is a sort of passive sharing that costs us nothing. That's easy. Anyone can do that. But, that is not what Paul is talking about here.

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What Paul is thanking the Philippians for is their **active, costly participation in the work of extending God's kingdom on earth**. They were called for a higher purpose. And they were willing to give their lives for the sake of that higher purpose. They were in the trenches together, working side by side. They were focused on a common goal. They worked hard together and didn't squabble about minor things that didn't matter and would distract them from the main thing, which was the extension of God's kingdom on earth, **"leading people to become committed followers of Jesus Christ."** Their participation with Paul was active and costly. And to them it was worth the effort and the cost.

¹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader* (Php 1:5). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

My parents would tell me about what it was like to live during the Second World War. They were quite young during the war, but they had some memories that they shared with us. They said, because everyone knew they were in a battle, they cooperated with the government who rationed their food and other essentials. I asked Google what it was like during that time and here is what I found:

In January 1942, Canada instituted a food rationing program. Gasoline was rationed in April 1942. Applications were filled out and war ration books were mailed to householders with stamps and coupons for specific allotments, plus extra coupons in case other items were added to the restricted list. At first, each person was permitted to buy 12 ounces of sugar a week and a limited amount of coffee and tea. By April, the sugar allotment was reduced to 8 ounces per week. Sharing, trading or selling the coupons was illegal until 1943, but people could save their own allotments for special events. By December of 1942, butter was added to the ration list, with a mere ½ pound per person.²

Now, I'm sure it wasn't easy for them to live like this, but they knew they were in a battle and they shared a common goal and a common enemy that would require active, costly participation.

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We too, at CRBC have a common goal, the expansion of God's kingdom in Campbell River. We also have a common enemy, the enemy of our souls who, the Bible says is the Devil and he is prowling around looking for people to devour.

Satan's goal is to distract as many people as he can away from Jesus so they will spend eternity with him in hell. As much as I hate the thought of it, there is a hell to avoid. It's easy to get distracted from the mission of Jesus. Jesus gave us a job to do. We are to partner with him in that mission to introduce and apprentice people in Jesus' kingdom kind of life so his kingdom can be expanded on earth, and join him for eternity in heaven.

Sometimes we can even get distracted by some things that are good. For example, we can get distracted by Bible study. Now, before you pounce on me and think I'm saying that Bible study is a distraction, it's not. However, if we think that Bible study is an end in itself, it is. We do not worship the Bible. We worship the God of the Bible. We worship Jesus. Jesus has called us to follow him.

Paul reminded the Philippians about what was really important. He wanted to make sure they didn't get distracted by what seemed good at the expense of the best. Here is what he says is most important:

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⁹ I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹⁰ For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. ¹¹ May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

What's important? Is it important to fill our heads with all kinds of Biblical knowledge and theology for its own sake? No! That kind of knowledge puffs up our heads. It deludes us into thinking we are mature when we are no closer to looking like Jesus than before we knew all that stuff. What's important?

² <http://www.suite101.com/content/canadian-war-rations-coupons-ww2-a49014>

Listen again:

⁹ I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹⁰ For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. ¹¹ May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

What is going to bring glory and praise to God? What does Paul say really matters? ***that your love will overflow more and more,... ¹¹ [that] you will always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ.***

He could not make it any clearer than that. This is why we exist as a church. That is why we spend time in God's Word. That is why we practice the presence of Jesus. That is why we budget a few hundred thousand dollars every year into the ministries of CRBC. The call of Jesus on our lives is to be transformed from the inside out by him so that others would see Jesus in us and be rescued from the clutches of Satan. That is why we invest our time, our energy, and our finances. God has called us to something higher than existing and accumulating more than our neighbours. We have a job to do. And when we get in on his mission our life takes on meaning.

Focus on the mission of Jesus and life takes on new meaning. Maybe you think it's too hard. Maybe you've been trying, but the pull is too strong. There are so many things distracting you. Well, here is Paul's encouragement to us in verse 6.

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⁶And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

God has not finished with us. I don't know about you, but that is extremely encouraging to me. I fail more often than I would like to admit. I sometimes take my mind off God's goal for me. I sometimes have my focus on things that are not really important. I sometimes don't love people the way God wants me to. I get impatient. Sometimes I'm not as gentle as I should be. And when these things happen, God has a way of showing me that the things I'm focusing on are not important. Here's what Paul said in chapter 2:

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Philippians 2:13 (NLT)

¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

God is working in us and he is not finished. He will not give up on us, but if we are going to see change we will need to cooperate with him. He won't force his way on us. We need to recognize that even our desire to do what he has called us to comes from him. We have to surrender everything to him and allow him to do a complete makeover of our hearts and minds so we don't do things for him out of obligation, but because, like Paul, we are so overwhelmed by his love for us that we cannot think of anything better to do. Our "ought to's" need to become "want to's." Here is the key that should give us some encouragement.

He is continually working in us, and he is continually working around us. The moment you received Christ, his Spirit took up residence in your heart, and he began a work to change you, and he is not going to stop until we are so full of the fruit of the Spirit that we are completely loving, joyful, peaceful, patient etc. That's going to be a lifetime project of course because we will never do those

things perfectly while we are on the earth. And some of us are so full of ourselves that it takes a little longer than others.

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Here's the deal. **We are all in the same boat. We cannot do this on our own. We need the Holy Spirit, and although some of us don't like to admit it, we also need each other.** Lone rangers do not grow. We are in a battle and we need each other to pray with, to stumble along together, to help each other up when we fall, to give each other grace and to prod each other on to Christ-likeness so we can do his work together.

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We should never get to the point where we think we have arrived. **We should have a sort of holy discontentment with where we are in our spiritual growth and our capacity to love.** That should be our goal. How many of you are satisfied with your ability to love others? I'm not. I want to grow in my love for you. I am quite awkward at loving at times. Let's repeat what Paul wrote:

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⁹ I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹⁰ For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. ¹¹ May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

Our goal for ourselves should be the same as Paul's for the Philippians, that our love would grow more and more so we would focus on the right things and grow in the fruit of the Spirit, so God would be glorified and his kingdom extended through us.

God wants our love to grow so much that we would see people around us through his eyes, so we would be moved to action, sharing that love in very practical ways with the people we work with, those we go to school with, the waiters and waitresses who serve us, the neighbours who live near us, our family who lives with us, and our brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we minister together with at CRBC. And, he wants us to do it all for the glory of God.

I see this is happening at CRBC. I see it more and more all the time. I see it in how you love each other in practical ways. I see it in how you cry with each other when you experience pain. I see it in how you serve each other and those outside the church. I see it in how you give sacrificially of your time, energy and finances for the sake of the Gospel of Christ.

But God never wants us to get to the place where we smugly think that we are good enough. God has so much more for us as we give him permission to show us the areas where we need to change. And I am looking forward to growing with you in our capacity to love in the years to come. God will do some amazingly wonderful things through us as we humbly submit to him. We are partners in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That means we cannot do it on our own. We need each other.

This is why we have our Growth Groups. I'm going to call Adrian up here right now to have a conversation about what these small groups are about.



Partners in the Gospel
Philippians 1:3-11
Week of September 18^h, 2016

Objective of this study: To understand more clearly how God wants to use each of us as part of a team to finish his task of expanding his kingdom on earth.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 33** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

What was the most effective team you have been a part of and why? (not necessarily a sport)

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

- o What stood out from the sermon?
- o Read Philippians 1:3-11
 - o Describe Paul's prayer:
 - o What are his emotions? Why does he feel this way?
 - o What are Paul's desires for the Philippians? Find at least five.
 - o The Greek word, *koinonia* is typically translated "fellowship" in English. It is defined as, "**A joint-participation in a common interest and activity.**" What are other English words you might use to capture this meaning?
 - o What did partnership mean to Paul?
 - o What else stood out to you in this passage and why?

Work (30-45 minutes)

Sermon Quote: "Paul is thanking the Philippians for their active, costly participation in the work of extending God's kingdom on earth. They were called for a higher purpose. And they were willing to give their lives for the sake of that higher purpose. They were in the trenches together, working side by side. They were focused on a common goal."

- What do you think partnership in the Gospel looks like for you?
- Are there things in your life that distract you or pull you away from this?

- Paul's prayer for the Philippians was that they would grow in their capacity to love. What are some ways the Holy Spirit is nudging you to grow in love?
- Spend the rest of the time in prayer for each other that the Holy Spirit would help change your "ought to's" to "want to's".