

A shared grace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 January 2026

Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 00] So, again, let's ready our hearts. Let's go to God in prayer first, and then we'll hear from Him. Father, thank you again that you are a God who is not silent,! that you speak to us.

And Lord, as I open up the book of Philippians this morning, I pray, Lord, that you would speak through it. You would soften our hearts, help us to be ready to receive what you have to say to us, orient our minds and our hearts so that they will be turned to you and your plans and purposes for us.

So, again, I commit this next 35, 40 minutes into your hands. Please, may by your spirit, fulfill your purpose. All this we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Now, have a look at this picture on the screen. This is a rope team. That's a group of climbers ascending a dangerous mountain, all tied into the same rope.

Notice how they are linked together. If one slips, the other catch them. If one struggles, the team slows and helps.

[1 : 19] If one makes progress, they rejoice together. Every step is taken in mutual trust, but that trust isn't ultimately in themselves.

It's in the rope. Now, why am I showing you this? Because this morning, I want to suggest that every strong community is really a rope team.

Every strong community is bound together by some sort of rope. A cause to fight for, a crisis to survive, or an enemy to oppose.

You see this in all sorts of groups. Armies, political parties, sports teams. So the question is, what is the Christian's rope?

What is it that binds us together and enables us to move together side by side in love and faith? We find our answer in verse 7.

[2 : 24] There, Paul is speaking of his relationship with his fellow believers in Philippi. And as you read those words, can you feel the warmth and affection behind them?

I hold you all dearly in my heart, he says. It is completely natural for me to feel this way because you guys were my rope team.

You stuck with me while I was in jail, on trial, proclaiming the gospel. So, 4 and of verse 7, all of you share in God's grace with me.

That's the rope that held us together. God's grace in Christ Jesus. God's infinite, undeserved gift of himself through Jesus.

And Paul says, my heart melts for you because you held onto that rope of Jesus Christ together with me. and it has bound us together.

[3 : 29] Now, that's the kind of close-knit relationship we dream of, isn't it? But this raises up a follow-up question. How do we know if we are truly living together as Christ's rope team?

What does grace actually do to a community? Paul shows us. In Philippians 1, verse 1 to 11, he pulls back the curtain on the inner life of a grace-bound church.

And three things stand out. First, we see an identity defined by God's grace. Second, we see a partnership grounded in God's grace.

And third, we see a prayer overflowing with God's grace. So let's walk through these verses and see how God's grace transforms our life together into Christ's rope team.

So first, let's see how God redefines our identity. Let's begin with verse 1. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi together with the overseers and deacons.

[4 : 47] So here is Paul introducing himself. And if you are familiar with his letters, you might notice something different straight away. What does he say?

Or rather, what doesn't he say? Well, notice he makes no mention he's an apostle. That's something he usually does, especially when he needs to establish his authority. But not here. Here, both he and Timothy simply call themselves servants. Or as we learned last week, slaves.

That's what the word literally means. Now, isn't that a little strange? Think about what usually happens when you meet someone for the first time.

One of the most common opening questions we ask is, so, what do you do? And we ask that because work gives us a reference point.

[5 : 46] To a certain extent, it helps us figure out someone's social position. Whether we realize it or not, work today has become shorthand for our identity and worth.

That's why we often ask and introduce ourselves via our vocations. And actually, even in the ancient world, that's how it worked too.

Being a Roman colony, the people in Philippi often related to one another on the basis of social hierarchy. And Paul could have played the game, couldn't he?

After all, it's not as if Paul doesn't have an impressive resume. If you glance ahead to Philippians chapter 3, you will see he has quite the pedigree. Born into the right family, trained at the right schools, meticulous in keeping every commandment.

In short, he is an obvious leader. But when he introduces himself, Paul doesn't feel the need to prove himself. He's more than happy to simply say, oh, what do I do?

[7 : 00] Oh, actually, I'm a servant of Jesus Christ. I'm his slave. I'm his. Then notice what he does next.

How does he go on to speak of others? Verse 1 again. You Philippian Christians are holy, he says. You aren't just some random nobodies. No, you have been set apart and consecrated to fulfill God's purposes. You are his special people.

And then he makes sure to address their leaders by their formal titles of overseer and deacon.

Again, this is something he does in no other letter.

Something deliberate is going on here. So, what is Paul really doing here? Well, Paul is showing us what grace does to a community.

[8 : 05] By deliberately lowering himself and Timothy while honoring his Philippian brothers and sisters, he turns the values of his world upside down.

He flips the world's cultural script. And in a city like Philippi, that would have stood out. This, after all, was a culture obsessed with rank, titles, and public recognition.

Things people chase to boost their social status. But Paul takes a different path. Why? Because he knows his new identity.

He knows who he follows. If he belongs to the one who lowered himself, the servant king, then of course he will gladly call himself a servant.

And that is actually a high calling. Because in doing so, Paul is already modeling what he will later call the church to embrace.

[9 : 13] The mindset of Christ. But this raises a deeper question. How can Paul do this?

What makes it possible for someone to freely lower themselves in a status-obsessed culture? And the answer is right there in verse 2.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, these aren't just polite greetings. Paul is pointing to the very foundation of how God has redefined him.

Four. What is grace? Grace is the love you receive when you've got nothing left to offer. It's that moment when your sin has found you out, your excuses have also run out, and yet God refuses to walk away from you.

Grace isn't so much you messing up and then God saying, oh, it doesn't matter. It's you messing up and God stepping in and saying, this matters so much, I will deal with it myself.

[10 : 29] And he does. He cleans up our mess in Christ. That's grace. And grace leads to peace. And not just some vague sense of calm, but the reality that we are no longer at war with God.

The hostility is over. And that, in turn, brings a profound sense of safety and security with others.

And what a gift that is, isn't it? It's even better than the blessing of health and wealth we usually wish one another during Chinese New Year. And here is the key.

Paul now extends grace and peace to others because he has first experienced them himself. That's something he'll talk more about in chapter 3.

And that's why he can freely lower himself while lifting others up. He lives by mercy, not by merit, for his life has been entirely redefined by grace.

[11 : 42] And brothers and sisters, here is the beautiful truth. When we share in that same grace, when we bind ourselves to that same rope of Christ, the same thing happens to us.

We know that we are nothing more than but sinners who have been transformed into saints. Now, saints just means holy people, as in verse 1.

And that's a title Paul makes clear belongs to every Christian, not just a spiritual elite. And in God's kingdom, saints become servants.

That's why earthly labels become unimportant. I'm a doctor. I'm a lawyer. I'm a pastor. That's no longer important.

And did you notice that when Paul addresses the overseers and deacons, he doesn't place them over the church, but together with the church?

[12 : 53] For on this rope team, our fundamental identity is identical. We are all saints and we are all servants.

But if so, how might that change the way we behave towards one another today? Well, let me suggest a few possibilities. First off, it kills off competition and comparison amongst ourselves. Today, just as in Philippi, we are prone to trying to climb over others in our offices or on our screens just to get ahead. But, if, according to Philippians 1, the CEO and the student, the retiree and the stay-at-home parent are all tied to the same rope, then there is no hierarchy of worth, is there? There's nothing to brag about. If we are all servants of Christ, we have no one to look down on. And now, instead of trying to outdo one another to gain honor, we try something completely different. We outrace one another. We bless more, we bear more, we build others up more. Now, that might mean celebrating the way someone else's Bible study group is spiritually growing, even if ours isn't experiencing the same growth.

[14 : 35] That might mean being generous with our resources, if that helps others. And second off, it transforms how we view service.

If we relate to one another as fellow slaves of Christ, no task is beneath us. Setting up chairs, making a meal for someone who is sick, listening to a friend's burden, isn't a chore.

It's an expression of who we are. We are not serving to get a higher position on the mountain. We are serving because the lead climber, Jesus, became a servant for us.

and I'm sure our brother Jeremy will have more to say on this when he brings us Philippians 2. So we know we are Christ's rope team when God's grace redefines our identity.

But notice, this new identity isn't private. It's communal. It immediately pulls us into something we do together.

[15 : 45] because if we are all servants of the same master, bound by the same grace, then of course, we will work side by side in the same mission.

And that brings us to the second thing Paul shows us in the opening verses, a partnership grounded in God's grace. Did you notice that's exactly why Paul is so thankful for the Philippians? In verse 3, he says, I thank my God every time I remember you. And then in verse 5, he says, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Now, that word partnership is worth pausing on because it captures something important about what the church is meant to be. Now, the Greek word underlying partnership *koinonia* is not easy to translate and it's worth understanding why.

On the one hand, you could translate that word as partnership, as Philippians 1 does in the NIV, partnership. But the thing about that word partnership is that it can sound cold and commercial, can't it?

[17 : 10] With apologies to the lawyers among us, it sounds like we're talking about law firms, and let's face it, law firms aren't exactly warm and fuzzy. love.

And what Paul is getting at with this word is more relational than that. On the other hand, the alternative translation, fellowship, has the opposite problem.

Although fellowship captures the warm relationships believers share, it usually conjures up images of Christians getting together to makan and nothing more. it lacks the intentionality that Paul also wants to convey.

So here's what Paul means by partnership in the gospel. Think warmth and intentionality. Not just people getting together to have a good time, but people getting together to get a job done.

People who share the same vision, roll up your sleeves, and get involved. And that's exactly what the church in Philippi became to Paul.

[18 : 21] They partnered with him in the great task of making sure that Jesus was magnified amongst believers and unbelievers alike. They didn't stay at a distance.

They got their hands dirty in the work of advancing the gospel. Because they understood partnership means your mission is my mission. Where you go, I go.

And as you read through this letter, you will see that they do this in all sorts of ways. Let me just give you a flavor. Take verse 7, for instance.

How easy it would have been for the Philippians to back away from Paul while he is in prison. They had every reason to. Associating with a condemned prisoner would easily have dragged down their reputation.

But they didn't. They stuck with Paul. They wholeheartedly shared in his ministry and message. Or take how they took care of his practical needs.

[19 : 32] Later on in chapter 2 verse 25, we will discover the Philippians had sent one of their own, a man named Epaphroditus, to make sure Paul was fed and clothed.

And this he did even at the risk to his own health. And then in 4 of 14 to 16, we learn that the Philippians have also been giving to Paul financially.

Their partnership extended to their wallets. Well, no wonder Paul is overjoyed. From the first day until now, these guys have been giving and praying and suffering with him.

And this, my friends, is what God wants the church to be. At its heart, church is really a gathering of partners in the gospel.

Because here is how it works. When you put your trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, the Bible says you are now in Christ.

[20 : 43] That phrase shows up all over Philippians. But being in Christ is never just an individual thing. It always pulls you into something bigger.

The New Testament uses all sorts of pictures for this. Sometimes it will say you have become part of a body. Other times it will say you are now part of a family.

It will even say you are like a brick in a building. But whatever the image, the point is the same. You are not just connected to Christ.

You are connected to one another. That's why Paul can say we share in God's grace. God's grace isn't something you receive on your own and keep it to yourself.

It is so big. It can't be limited to you alone. You have a share in it, but so do others.

[21 : 49] And that's why we should never think of the Christian life as a solo climb. Instead, it is a shared journey. We are meant to move together, side by side as partners in the gospel.

That's how God designed church to be. So today, brothers and sisters, do you call yourself a Christian? Then by definition, you are a partner.

You're someone called to give your time, your talent, even your earthly treasures, together with others to make Jesus known.

And actually, when you choose to become an active partner in the gospel, that is evidence God is truly doing a good work in you.

And what a joy that can be, can't it? Because you never know how God might use your partnership to impact the world. When I first preached on this passage, nearly 10 years ago, I shared the story of Humphrey Monmouth.

[23 : 05] But I thought it worth sharing again because it perfectly illustrates what gospel partnership looks like in practice. So who was Humphrey Monmouth?

You might not recognize the name, but I think you might know his close friend, William Tyndale. Tyndale was the man who, in the 16th century, translated the Bible into everyday English so that ordinary people could read God's word for themselves.

But Monmouth was the man behind the scenes. He was a wealthy businessman who made sure Tyndale could keep going, providing him with money, food, and a place to stay while he labored over that translation.

He helped connect Tyndale with a secret network of printers so that English Bibles could actually be published and smuggled into England. And here is the point.

Because Monmouth chose to partner in the gospel, his impact has echoed through the centuries.

You may have never heard his name, but if you are holding an English Bible today, you are a

beneficiary of that partnership.

[24 : 31] Tyndale translated, Monmouth supported, different roles, same gospel, and God used both.

So here's what we can be confident of. True partnerships in the gospel will never be in vain. Why do I say that?

Not just because church history shows us, but because the Bible itself confirms it. Did you notice verse 6? Paul thanks God not just because his partnership with the Philippians exists, but also because he is confident that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It's hard work being a partner, isn't it? It's hard work to keep praying, keep giving, keep helping practically. So how was this Philippian partnership sustained?

Simple. because God was at work renewing their hearts and strengthening their faith. You see, verse 6 is teaching us a vital truth.

[25 : 56] It's telling us that God's preservation of the saints is the basis for their perseverance. God's preservation of the saints is the basis for their perseverance.

perseverance. If God doesn't actively preserve us, none of us will make it to the finish line. But the good news is, God does.

His preservation of us is simply an outworking of His grace. And it gives us fresh motivation to come alongside, side by side, with one another for the long haul.

So my friends, let's ask, how can we hold the rope for one another today? Perhaps we can do so by not leaving the work of sharing the gospel simply to those in the pulpit, but being ready to work with your Christian friends to do the same in your workplaces or your friendship groups.

Perhaps we can do so by being willing to stand alongside your fellow Christian whenever they're living out the gospel, even if they're being made fun of. And perhaps we can do so by committing to pray regularly for one another, not just for felt needs, but for us to actively obey Jesus wherever we are.

[27 : 29] that's exactly what Paul does. Verse 4 tells us he often prays for the Philippians because he understands that if we want to be Christ's rope team, we need more than good intentions.

We need God's power. And that brings us to the third thing Paul shows us, a prayer overflowing with God's grace.

In verses 9 to 11, we now get to overhear what Paul is actually praying for. So listen to this, verse 9, and this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, through the glory and praise of God.

Now, I don't know about you, but at first glance, reading that prayer is pretty dense. But if we break it down, we can say Paul is really praying for three things.

First, he is praying that our love may abound more and more. Look back at verse 8. Paul has just said, God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

[29 : 05] So he's saying that Christ's love has so filled Paul's heart that it overflows towards the Philippians. And now, that is exactly what he is also praying for them.

God, let them experience your love more and more. Let them know how much you love them, that you didn't spare your own son for their sake, that you are attentive to every detail of their lives. And as they grasp your love, may they grow in their love for you, a love so full it naturally spills out towards others.

that's what Paul is praying. It's a big prayer, isn't it? But Paul says we need big prayers, because partnership is hard work.

Even amongst Christians, we know tensions can arise. If you have served in church for some time, you'll notice. Sometimes we step on each other's toes.

[30 : 14] So how can we keep going? By praying, we will never stop drawing from God's well of love to pass on to others. For deep in God's heart is a love so vast it can never be exhausted.

And that's the shared grace we need. So this is the kind of prayer we should pray constantly here at KEC. Lord, make us a church that knows the love of Jesus, loves him in return, and therefore loves one another.

And how do we know when God is answering that prayer? Well, when we look at one another in different situations, with different challenges, and if we are asking the same thing, how does God want me to move towards that person, then I think we can be confident God is starting to answer that prayer.

We abound in love more and more when we stop withholding it. But Paul doesn't stop there.

Second, Paul prays that our love will be shaped by a deep knowledge of God.

In other words, Paul is not asking for some sentimental, superficial feeling. The love he is asking for is not vague.

[31 : 52] No, this is a love that is governed by God's word. The assumption is that you cannot grow in love without also growing in the knowledge of God and an insight into his ways.

The thing he loves and what it's like. And we all understand this instinctively from our close relationships, right? You don't grow in love simply by gazing into one another's eyes.

No, you grow in love by spending time together, by listening, by learning what the other person cares about. She values neatness.

He's a morning person. And the more you know, the better you can love. So it is with Christ. If the affections of Christ Jesus are to truly grow in us, our knowledge of God's word must grow as well. Why? Because only then do we know how to truly love people. love. Sometimes, what feels loving isn't actually what is best.

[33 : 11] So we might think, oh, someone needs a long theological explanation, when at that moment, what they need is just your presence. Or we might think, someone just needs an encouraging word, when what might be the most loving, what is most loving for them is to hear a challenge from you as well.

And that's why we need God's word thoroughly inside us, so that we can grow in discernment and learn to love people the way Jesus would, even when it's costly or uncomfortable.

But why does Paul want us to have this knowledgeable, discerning love? Because third, Paul prays that we will finish well as those pure, blameless, and filled with the fruit of righteousness.

That's verses 10 and 11. You see, although Paul hasn't finished climbing the mountain yet, he's already looking ahead to the summit, the day of Christ.

And his great desire is that when we reach that day and stand before our king, we will be found to be genuine, and not double-minded.

[34 : 33] The word for pure here describes something that is unmixed, such as someone lacking hidden motives. It refers to something that is held up in the light and found to have no cracks, no hidden flaws, nothing to indicate that it is fake.

And that's what Paul is praying, we will be like. And he prays, we will be filled with the fruit of righteousness, like a tree in full bloom, mature and fruitful.

But notice, that fruit comes through Jesus Christ. It emerges from being united with him, not apart from him.

just as a climber on a rope, on a rope team, begins to mirror the movements of the lead climber, so we become like Jesus as we stay connected to him.

That's what grace achieves. It transforms us into people who reflect Christ's character more and more, all the way to the finish line.

[35 : 49] So there we have it, friends, the inner life of a grace-bound church. An identity we define by grace, where we are all saints who serve without status.

A partnership grounded in grace, where we move side by side in the mission. A prayer overflowing with grace, asking God to grow our love, sharpen our discernment, and fill us with righteous fruit, all through Jesus Christ, to God's glory.

That is Christ's rope team. And brothers and sisters, this is what we're meant to be. So let me finish with a question for each of us here today.

if you are here and you haven't yet grabbed hold of the rope, if you haven't trusted in Jesus' gift of forgiveness and new life, why wait?

This grace is being offered to you right now. The rope is there, grab hold of it. Talk to me or one of our leaders after this service.

[37 : 09] We would love to help you take that step. And if you have grabbed hold of the rope, then here is my challenge. Will you climb together with your brothers and sisters towards the day of Christ?

Will you commit afresh to this life of shared grace? Praying earnestly? Partnering sacrificially? blessing generously.

Because that is what we are made for. That is the rope team. And yes, being on the rope team means sometimes walking through treacherous terrain, but we never have to be afraid because his beautiful promise is this.

His grace will hold us together every step of the way. So, shall we walk together?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we reflect on the words of Philippians 1, I pray that you help us to take them in slowly, reflectively, to digest them.

[38 : 39] I pray, Lord, that you would convict our hearts hearts, that we might want to be partners in the gospel, to be partners in the great work that you have given to us, to live for you, for your glory, every day of our lives, and not just individually, but together.

So, I pray that here at KAC we will do that, that we will be able to say to one another, all of you share in God's grace with me, so that together we can keep running the race, and being confident that you will bring to completion what you have started.

So, I just comment all of us at the beginning of the year that this will be our resolve, this will be what we want, please change our desires so that together we can move forward for you.

all this we pray in the name of Christ. Amen. Amen.