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CARE AND CONFIDENCE IN THE CAPITOL (Philippians 1:1-6)

Take a moment and think of one word that would characterize your personal attitude during the busy days of the legislative session. I'm sure we would hear a wide range of responses to that question if we polled the whole General Assembly and I'm guessing that many of them would be negative words. It is so hard to maintain an optimistic outlook when the pressures of public office weigh so heavily on your mind – pressure from constituents, colleagues (from both sides of the aisle), leadership, and even family at home. Staying positive in the middle of all the whirl of activity can prove impossible. Yet we know that it is good and healthy to try to keep a positive viewpoint. What are we to do?

The New Testament book of Philippians was written by the Apostle Paul, probably the most well-known missionary, to some people who were very special to him. The uplifting theme of this letter is joy, something that we all long to experience. As we move through this book during 2016, my prayer is that the truths found in these passages will cause us to find what real joy is and how we can experience it daily. It's a great letter that points the reader to timeless words of faith that remind us that joy is actually possible, even during the worst of times.

C. S. Lewis thought that we don't experience joy the way we should because we don't really know what it is. He wrote, "Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

PAUL'S COMMITMENT TO THE CHURCH

Philippians 1:1, 2 – Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at

Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The opening of Paul's letter to the Philippian church is similar to those of his other epistles. He writes that Timothy is with him, a trusted protégé and coworker. He uses the word "servant" (*doulos*) to describe himself and Timothy – servants or slaves of Christ Jesus. This was a common thought Paul used through his whole ministry, namely that he was owned by another and he was dependent on him for all he needed. He willingly served Christ and also had the same attitude toward these new believers in the early churches. He was there to serve. It's quite an honor as well as a heavy task when we serve others. Any legislator would agree, but being a public servant can also be rewarding. Paul and Timothy knew the ultimate joy of serving Christ and fully gave themselves to it.

The address is to the saints, which is not some elevated class of Christian, but biblically means all of those who are redeemed followers of Jesus. In Acts 16, we see the start of the ministry in the influential Macedonian city of Philippi. Paul and Silas caused quite a stir, seeing some conversions, being arrested, then were miraculously set free. In their time there, a church was established and when we read this letter Paul wrote to them years later, it is clear he had a special place in his heart for them.

PAUL'S CARE FOR THE CHURCH

Philippians 1:3-5 – I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

There were times when Paul wrote to churches to correct them, sometimes harshly (1 Corinthians and Galatians, for example.) Not so with the Philippians. His joy was full when writing to this group of believers

and his opening thoughts show his gratitude for them, their spiritual growth, and their partnership in the ministry.

The warmth Paul displays here is a tremendous reminder to all of us that we cannot take people for granted who have been put into our lives as God's blessing. We need to express gratitude to these folks, letting them know we are thankful for them. We also should follow Paul's example to regularly pray for them, that they would be faithful in their walk with God or that they would begin to respond to him in faith.

To be a person of prayer is to be centered on others. That means having constant interaction with those in our sphere of relationships. Keeping in contact is essential to knowing how to pray for friends. Social media can be a big help in this area, if we don't let the time online actually substitute for relating personally. However we choose to connect with others, we should use our interaction to fuel our times of intercessory prayer for them.

PAUL'S CONFIDENCE FOR THE CHURCH

*Philippians 1:6 – 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.***

This is a well-loved verse that is packed with meaning and encouragement. After Paul expresses his care for the Philippian believers, he writes possibly the most reassuring thought one can share. God is working in you and wants a growing relationship with you that will bring glory to him. Not only that, but he will do the work himself and will not stop the process until it has been completed.

We're in the middle of a presidential campaign season right now. There are many promises being made, many predictions of what our country will be like if Candidate X is elected. They all sound so sure, so confident. We know the truth, though, is that none of these candidates can know for sure what will happen in the future. When you ran for office, there were probably changes that you hoped to make

that have proven to be difficult, if not impossible. Why is that? Why can't we know what's going to happen in the future with any certainty?

Any prediction we make of the future about this world or the impact we want to have on it is at the mercy of one who controls it all. Paul does not have that problem in this verse. He predicts the future with total confidence because the ground of his confidence is the character of God himself. When God starts a work in the life of a person, there is an end goal in view. It is not in God's nature to start something good only to quit part of the way through.

For those who are called to be God's children and believe in him, there is a process known as sanctification that is characterized by growth and faithfulness. This is the process God uses to make one complete – a state that is in the future for all believers in Christ. Later in this book, Paul will write these words:

*Philippians 3:12-14 - **Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

If God has already begun this work in you, be encouraged. He will not quit on you. He saved you completely, but will keep working on those rough edges the rest of your life until you are complete in him. If you have not confessed Christ as Lord and accepted his free offer of salvation, you can begin this incredible journey toward being complete by trusting him as the only way to experience true joy in this life and reach heaven with him in the life to come.

BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)

Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.

Room 153 House Office Building