

I Hold You In My Heart

Philippians 1:1-11

KEY VERSES

*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops^[a] and deacons:^[b] **2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **3** I thank my God for every remembrance of you, **4** always in every one of my prayers for all of you, praying with joy **5** for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. **6** I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete^[c] it until the day of Jesus Christ. **7** It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart,^[d] for all of you are my partners in God's grace,^[e] both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. **8** For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the tender affection of Christ Jesus. **9** And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight **10** to help you to determine what really matters, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, **11** having produced the harvest^[f] of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.*

This sermon marks the beginning of a 13-week series through the four-chapter book of **Philippians** - the last letter written by Paul in the New Testament. Unlike Paul's other letters, the tone of Philippians is one of more gratitude and joy than the more aggressive, directive tone found in his other letters. The setting of this letter is key to understand - a filthy Roman prison where Paul awaits death. The tone and content of this letter that he chooses to write to the the church community in Philippi as he awaits death will speak to us about what living looks like over the next three months. **Place yourself in Paul's situation - to whom would you write a letter? What would your feelings be about God - would you feel angry, abandoned, or hopeful?**

We must keep in mind that this is a letter that would have been read from beginning to end, rather than the listener or reader choosing only certain parts that they like. **Think about and discuss how the themes present throughout these 11 verses are alive in your own life today:**

1) This is a letter of joy and gratitude, not the tone of a man in a pit waiting to die. Joy and gratitude are a choice rather than a result of external circumstances. **What does this teach us about what joy and gratitude look like?**

2) Joy and gratitude spring from connection to God and community. When we're in difficulty sometimes that becomes all we can see. We have a choice in looking up and beyond our circumstances to presence of God, and who God has placed in his life. **Who are the people that you hold in your heart, as Paul holds the Philippians?**

As people are facing the end of their lives, they tend to think about those who are part of their stories, and also the regrets that might plague them. Paul shows us that we in fact do have more choices about where our minds, hearts, and faith point us than we can ever really understand. When we make choices about how we want to live, a joy and gratitude can exist in us that simply can't be avoided as followers of Christ. **No matter what is going on in your life, how can you choose to move beyond your own point of view to what God is doing in this world and to treasure the people you hold most closely in your heart? This week, may we choose to sift through the myriad of options we face to where meaning and purpose are truly found. Amen.**