

For Sunday, July 11, 2021

**Lesson from N.T. Wright's "For Everyone Bible Study Guides - Collection"**

## **Paul's Reasons for Thanks**

### ***Phl 1:1-11***

There's a wonderful old prayer attributed to the sixteenth-century sailor Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596). He prays that when God leads us to undertake any great piece of work, he will also remind us "that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same, until it be thoroughly finished, that yieldeth the true glory." Drake himself was certainly a "finisher" as well as a "beginner." As well as being a legend in his own lifetime for his military exploits, he had sailed right round the world. Once you've set off on a journey like that, there's no point stopping halfway.

### **Open**

What are some examples you've seen that bear out this principle that there is more glory in finishing than beginning?

### **Study**

1. *Read Phl 1:1-11.* In this opening to his letter, what convictions does Paul express?
2. Why did the Philippians bring Paul joy?
3. Who is someone of whom you can say "I thank my God every time I think of you" (v. 3), and why?
4. This letter is all about *partnership* (v. 5) , one of the most important words in Paul's vocabulary. It is sometimes translated *fellowship*, but it clearly has a practical, even financial, implication which our word *fellowship* doesn't always carry. Although it develops particular Christian meanings, including the delighted sharing of worship, prayer, and mutual support and friendship, in Paul's world it was the normal word for a business partnership, in which all those involved would share in doing the work on the one hand and in the financial responsibilities on the other.

How had the Philippians worked in partnership with Paul?

5. Consider the Christian community you are part of. Would you say that you are in partnership for the gospel, or is your fellowship more social? Why do you answer as you do?
6. As Sir Francis Drake reminded us in his prayer, the glory is not in beginning a great task but in finishing it. The confidence Paul has throughout this letter is that God himself is a *finisher* as well as a *beginner* (v. 6). The particular work which God has begun, and will finish, is the work of grace, through the gospel, in the hearts and lives of the Philippian Christians.

How is it easy or hard for you to trust God to complete the work he's started in you or in others? And why?

7. Paul prays that the Philippians' love will overflow in knowledge and wisdom (v. 9). How does this idea contrast with more popular ideas of love?
8. Paul also prays that this wise love will result in moral discernment (v. 10). Why is moral discernment a necessary component of Christian love?
9. Finally Paul prays that the Philippians may be filled to overflowing with the fruit of right living (v. 11). The word for *right living* is often translated *righteousness*. Here it emphasizes the behavior which results from both God's faithfulness and the status of being forgiven family members. What are some of the fruits of right living?

At every stage of the process—when people first hear the gospel, when they believe it, when they begin to live by it, and when they make progress in faith and love—nothing is done to the glory of the people concerned, as though they were able arrogantly to advance their own cause. Everything is done, as Paul insists here, through King Jesus, "to God's glory and praise" (v. 11).

10. Despite being in prison (v. 7), Paul begins his letter with an overflow of joy. How and why do you experience joy in your Christian life?

## **Pray**

Paul's prayer for the church (vv. 9-11) is a prayer that all church leaders might wish to use for the people in their care. It is also a prayer that every Christian might use for himself or herself. For yourself and for others, pray that all of you will have love which overflows in knowledge and wisdom, the ability to discern right from wrong, and the fruit of right living to the glory of God.