

# Intro to Philippians – Manuscript

Philippians 1:1-2

**Focus:** Those belonging to the church are saints in Christ, servants of Christ, and receive the benefits of infinite grace and transcendent peace all through God the Father and Jesus Christ.

**Function:** By God’s grace, this sermon will encourage City Life Church to find their identity as saints and servants of Christ, who receive his infinite grace and transcendent peace. It will encourage them to begin looking to Christ for rejuvenation and joyful contentment.

This morning, Jonathan invited me to help us kick off a new series in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. If you don’t know, Jonathan is going on sabbatical for the summer. He has been leading, preaching, and pastoring non-stop for the last 10 years or so, so you guys as a church are blessing him with some time away to be refreshed and rejuvenated for the hard work of ministry when he returns in the fall. So if you’re new here, you won’t see Jonathan throughout the summer, but instead you’ll see other elders and leaders preaching on Sundays – these are guys that love you as a church and would love to get to know you and help you get connected. If you are a partner here or have been around a while, I want to invite you to pray for Jonathan as he is away – that God would bless and refresh him during this time.

So why spend the summer working through the book of Philippians? What I want to do today is give us some context for why this letter might be helpful for us and then spend some time looking at the first two verses in Philippians 1. So before we dive in, let’s read this very short passage one more time and pray:

## Read Philippians 1:1-2

### Greeting

[1] Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

[2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (ESV)

### Let’s pray.

### Introduction to Philippians

If you don’t know, Philippians is Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi in Macedonia, which was Paul’s very first church in Europe. This church was started in a diverse city among a socially, economically, and culturally diverse group of people – an upper class merchant woman named Lydia, a working class roman jailer, and a Greek slave girl are some of the people Paul is writing to in this church. He is writing to this church while he is in prison in

Rome primarily for the purpose of encouraging them in the faith. Contrary to other Pauline letters, Philippians is not a letter of rebuke or correction, but a letter of loving encouragement. You can feel the deep affection that Paul has for these people. Even more than that, Paul's letter contains some of his most dramatic and empowering words, revealing the surpassing joy of knowing Christ. St. Paul's *Letter to the Philippians* contains the secret of contentment, offers possibilities of persevering joy, and reveals how Christ has created us to flourish in service of one another.

Because Philippians is ultimately a letter of encouragement for the church, it seems like this seems like a great letter for us to spend time in this summer. Summer is a time we often look to for rest and rejuvenation in life. We've all had busy springs with kids, school, work, ministry, and other activities and we are looking forward to being revitalized during this season. But too often we return from summer just as mentally and spiritually exhausted as we started. If we can take to heart Paul's words – if we can take hold of his message on the secret of true contentment, persevering joy, and how we flourish in service, then we may be able to experience the joy and rest that we long for, not only this summer, but throughout our lives.

Today, we are going to look at the first two verses which give us the solid foundation we need to enter into the rest of the letter – these first two verses are all about *identity*.

What is identity and why is it important? Your identity is who you are – it's your sense of significance and your sense of self worth. What makes you significant? What forms the foundation for your life? Understanding who you are is paramount because how we conceive of ourselves determines how we live in the world. It all starts with our identity. ***Our understanding of who we are always leads to what we do.*** It's actually pretty simple. If your primary sense of significance is found in your career, then you'll always make decisions in light of your work. If your primary identity is found in the role of being a parent, all decisions will be made in light of your kids and family. If your primary identity is in being a cool, hip Austinite, then you'll make decisions that conform to the values of Austin – hip, vintage, artistic, ironic, and individualistic. ***Our conception of who we are always determines how we live.***

In the culture, we often hear that our identity is something that we create ourselves – that it's through our own actions, accomplishments, and choices that we forge who we are. The Christian vision couldn't be more the opposite. Our identity is given to us based on the work of someone else. Now we could expound on this for days, but what I want us to do, very simply, is to take a brief look at these first two verses in Philippians and see what Paul indicates about our identity. In his short salutation, we can see three elements of who we are that I want to consider this morning. Paul shows us in his salutation, that if you are a Christian then you are:

1. Saints in Christ
2. Servants of Christ
3. Recipients of Grace and Peace from Christ

As we understand these truths, these identities, then we'll be better primed to receive and embody Paul's words throughout the rest of the letter.

### **Saints in Christ**

First let's consider the audience – Paul is writing to members of the Philippian church, but *he doesn't just call them Philippians or members of the church – calls them saints*. This is not just a filler title, but is describing who they are – their identity.

What does it mean to be a saint? Saint comes from the Greek word “hagios” which means set apart, sacred, or holy. The best way to understand this is that being a saint is not just being separated from something, but means that you belong to a different order of things – for the saint it is a sacred, holy order. Now we know that the archetype and the very source of holiness, the epitome of moral perfection is God himself. Isaiah describes the Lord as “Holy, Holy, Holy” – the repeating refrain being a symbol of his indescribable holiness. *So what Paul is communicating in his identification of the Philippian Christians as saints is that in the same way that God belongs to a different order of things in his moral perfection and holiness, the saint also is set apart to belong to God's holy order.* Peter, in [2 Peter 1:4](#), describes this in a very unique way, he says that we are “[partakers of the divine nature.](#)” **If you are a Christian, then you are also a saint – you are also a partaker of the divine nature, set apart by God to belong to a his holy order.**

Remember we said that our understanding of who we are always leads to what we do? If God has made us saints, participants in the divine nature, what should that identity lead to? A holy identity leads to a holy life. We live according to different set of values and conform our lives to a different way of being in the world. We now live different lives because our decisions are made in reference to God – we take on holy values and seek to imitate the archetype of holiness, God himself. Because we are saints, made holy by God, we seek to live holy lives in the world that reflect the holiness of our God. We seek to worship God in all of life, we seek justice in his world, we show mercy and generosity, we seek moral rectitude, and we seek to live pure lives.

Unfortunately, rather than living lives in sync with God and his holy order, we often resign to life according to a worldly order. One question that helped me consider my own life was this: *Am I more of an Austinite or a Christian?* If someone looked at my life, would my characteristics, the schedule that I keep, and the things I spend money on reflect more of my belonging to Austin or God's Kingdom:

1. Is my schedule filled more with shows and days at the greenbelt, or with serving my community and others in the city?
2. Does my money funnel into myself, or is it generously being poured out for others as Christ poured himself out for me?
3. Am I more known as someone who is cynical and ironic, or someone who makes meaningful deposits into the lives of others with my words?

Maybe you need to retune that question to yourself. Are you more of an entrepreneur or a Christian? Are you more of an artist or a Christian? Are you a parent first and a Christian second? Of course, none of those things are bad, but our saintly identity should shape the

force everything else we do. If we are going to tap into the joy and contentment that Paul lifts up for us in this letter, we need to first remember who we are. We are not primarily Austinites, but saints – called out by God to belong to a holy order that reflects God’s holy character. In turn, as we live into our identity as saints, we’ll find that our lives begin to go along the grain of the universe – even in the hard times we will have a sense that this is how life out to be. As we turn less on ourselves and more toward God, toward others, we’ll find that God has actually designed us to live as a holy people.

### **Servants of Christ**

Paul calls the Philippian church saints, but he refers to himself and Timothy as *servants of Christ Jesus*. What is unique about this, is that in all Paul’s other letters he refers to himself as an apostle – someone whom God has commissioned to spearhead this work of building his church with a certain level of authority. Rather than harkening to his God given authority, in this letter Paul identifies himself in humility as a servant – and not just a servant in our terms but a slave of Christ Jesus! His life is completely disposed to the will Christ. As this servant identity is true of Paul and Timothy, so is it also true of us if we are saints in Christ. Those set apart as saints in Christ are also servants of Christ.

A fundamental aspect of our belonging to a different order is that we now serve a different master. We are servants of Christ. What does it mean to be a servant of Christ? Being a servant of Christ means that we allow Jesus to control our actions and our attitudes.

We serve Jesus with our actions by giving up on our will and giving in to his will. We make decisions not simply based on what might be good or bad for us, but on what might serve Christ and his purposes the best. If there are not decisions in our life where we can look back and say that I made this solely for the purpose of serving Jesus, then we may not be serving Jesus. There should be moments in our life that only make sense because we are servants of Christ. **[Example]**

We serve Jesus with our attitudes by taking up the attitude of a joy-filled servant. We recognize that being a servant is not just being a person who serves, but actually embodying the posture of a servant – conceiving of our whole life as a servant to the king, and in turn to others. What does that mean? Paul says we do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourself – he says to have this mind among you, which is ours in Christ Jesus, that he did not count equality with God but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant...

We not only participate in the act of serving, but we are to have the mind of a servant – always looking to lower ourselves for the service of others. Always willing to honor others more. **EX:** There is a difference between a musician and a person who “plays music.” Someone who plays music can sit down and bang out some chords on a guitar no problem, but a musician has developed a second nature where she can turn the raw material of strings and wood into beauty. The creativity of the true musician comes from the mind of a musician. In the same way, there is a difference between someone who serves and a true servant. Someone who serves is a person who knows what they are supposed to do and does it to check it off the list. A servant has a different mind and orientation to the world.

The servant of Christ Jesus continually counts others more significant than himself. And you know it when you meet someone who embodies their identity as a servant – someone who consistently conceives of herself in those terms. If you are doing something, they are always helping you, but in a way that doesn't draw attention to their helping. You walk away from a conversation with a servant and you realize they asked you all the questions – being thoughtful toward you, listening attentively to you, considering you more important than herself. In an article based of his book “The Road to Character,” New York Columnist David Brooks makes this description:

*“About once a month I run across a person who radiates an inner light. These people can be in any walk of life. They seem deeply good. They listen well. They make you feel funny and valued. You often catch them looking after other people and as they do so their laugh is musical and their manner is infused with gratitude. They are not thinking about what wonderful work they are doing. They are not thinking about themselves at all.”*

Pastor and author Tim Keller adds to this description of the humble servant in the Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness when he says:

*“If we were to meet a truly humble person...we would never come away from meeting them thinking they were humble. They would not be always telling us they were a nobody (because a person who keeps saying they are a nobody is actually a self-obsessed person). The thing we would remember from meeting a truly gospel-humble person is how much they seemed to be totally interested in us. Because the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.”*

As servants of Jesus, we serve him by serving others. We serve others not simply by doing a bunch of tasks, but by embodying the lifestyle of a servant. We humbly count others more significant than ourselves. This sounds hard, right? The great thing is, we don't have to discipline ourselves into embodying our identity as servants, because Paul says that this mind is ours in Christ Jesus. Jesus has already given us the resources we need to live such a life. These resources grow the more we look at the person of Christ. When we consider Christ who, though he was equal with God, did not count himself as such, but humbled himself all the way to death on a cross on our behalf, we are moved by his humble service to live into our identity as his servants.

One practical way for you to consider whether you are living into this identity or not is to ask yourself these two questions:

1. How comfortable are you with being treated like a servant?
2. How easy is it for you to forgo asserting yourself and instead lift up someone else?

If you are uncomfortable being treated like a servant to others, or if you have an insatiable need to assert your self – your life, your opinions, and your stories – then I would challenge you to look to Christ's humble service toward you at the cross and remember that just as he is a servant, so has are you a servant of Christ Jesus.

## Recipients of Grace and Peace from Christ

I want to make one final, brief point about our identity that we find here at the beginning of Philippians. Finally, we are not only saints in Christ – members of a holy order meant to live a holy life; we are not only servants – serving different master bearing a different mind; *we are also recipients of grace and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is fundamental. To be a Christian is ultimately to be a recipient. Our most foundational identity is not something that is won, found, or conjured up in life, but is an identity that is received through no effort of our own, but through the person of Christ. If you are in here today and are not a Christian, this is something I really want you to hear. In Christ, there is an opportunity to rest from the futile task of trying to make your life significant, and instead receive significance as a saint and a servant of Christ. You'll notice that every phrase in these two verses is connected to Jesus. We are saints in Christ, servants of Christ, and recipients of grace and peace through God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to say two short things about Paul's blessing of grace and peace. Though the phrase "Grace and Peace" is a common Christian greeting, it points toward the richest gifts available in Christ.

If you are in Christ, you are a recipient of his infinite grace. Though we have pursued a life according to the world, rather than God's holy order; though we have served ourselves rather than Christ and others, God has graciously reconciled us to himself through the shed blood of Jesus and the power of his resurrection and given us a new identity as saints and servants. ***Before you do a single holy act, he calls you a saint. Before you perform one act of selfless service, Jesus calls you his servant.*** All we must do is put our faith, our trust, and our hope in him.

I want to remind you today that this grace not only rescued you at a point in time, but always stands available for you. Jesus is always ready to extend his grace and forgiveness to you. Maybe some of you need to hear that this morning.

If you are in Christ, you are also a recipient of peace. What kind of peace is Paul alluding to? Later in the letter Paul describes the peace that is available to us as a ["peace that transcends all understanding that will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."](#) In Christ, we have a transcendent peace that is available even when the entirety of our circumstance tells us otherwise – in the face of sickness, death, and disaster we have a peace because we have a God who has power over death.

When we receive God's infinite grace and his transcendent peace in Jesus, we become changed people. Not only do we begin to carry an impenetrable gratitude into all of life, but we also desire to live holy lives unto God, in sync with our identity as saints. We begin to experience the freedom and joy of humble service.

The most important thing for us to realize is that all these identities come to us in the person of Christ. Jesus is the place where our lives find their center. We are saints in Christ – he sets us apart to a holy order through his work. We are servants of Christ – serving him

as our utmost goal in life. And we are recipients of grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. This is the word for us as we begin this summer and begin this journey through Philippians: As we set our sights on a new season, let's not look to summer or vacations to bring us the joy, rest, or contentment we need, let's look to Christ. The one who gives us an identity and the surpassing benefits of his grace and peace.