

## Conclusion

The relationship between missionaries and their supporting churches and individuals must be founded on more than friendship if it is going to be lasting and strong. It must be founded on the gospel. But it will be seen in very practical ways. A true 'partnership in the gospel' will be clear to both parties.

1. Break into groups of 2 and 3 and discuss ways in which you **as individuals** can practically express your care for and partnership with your missionaries.

*Encourage people to not only think of 'friendship' ways in which they can care, but also 'partnership in the gospel' ways e.g. to write Christian encouragement in emails, not just news or expressions of care.*

2. Come together as a large group and discuss ways in which you **as a group** can practically express your care for and partnership with your missionaries.

3. When you next meet, why not commit to writing a letter or e-mail to your missionaries telling them what you have learned and how you are intending to work it out in the future (remember to be careful what you write if they are in a sensitive location).

## Care

## leader's notes

### PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

#### Introductory Brainstorm

Tell the group about a time when a Christian friend has shown their care for you in a special way.

#### Read Philippians 1:3-11

Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians to thank them for a financial gift they had sent him while he was in prison and to explain why Epaphroditus, their messenger, was coming back sooner than expected. As he did this, he took the opportunity to thank and encourage them for their wider 'partnership in the gospel', as well as dealing with some of the issues that were facing them as a church.

List the words and phrases within the passage that speak about the relationship between Paul and these Christians. What do they tell you about the nature of that relationship?

*Joy, partnership, feel this way about you, have you in my heart (or you have me in your heart), share in God's grace, long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

*It expresses a deep and rich relationship between Paul and the Philippians, which is a real challenge to us as we consider our relationship with our link missionaries. However, it was also unusual among the Pauline churches – no other letter expresses this depth of relationship between Paul and the church.*

The depth and breadth of the Philippians concern for, and relationship with, Paul is all the more amazing when you realise how little time they had to build this relationship (read Acts 16:11-40 to see the story of Paul's short stay in Philippi). Also, his opportunities to meet and communicate with them were very infrequent (there were no planes, cars, telephones or e-mail in those days, and a letter had to wait until there was someone to take it – this is probably the reason for his comment in 4:10-11).

1. Read through Philippians 1:1-11 again. What lay at the foundation of the relationship?

*The foundation lay in the gospel and in their common faith and growth in Christ.*

2. How may this have enabled the partnership between Paul and the Philippians to remain strong and lasting?

*It is not wrong to enjoy a deep friendship with fellow Christians – including missionaries – but if that lies at the foundation of our relationships they will not be 'partnerships in the gospel'.*

*We need to help people see the difference between the two, and to think about how that will affect the way in which we express and build the relationship.*

3. Think about the missionaries connected with your church. How would you describe the relationship of you (or your church) to them?

4. Could you speak about this relationship in the way Paul does? Why/why not?

## The relationship in practice

The Philippians expressed their relationship with Paul in many practical ways. Split into groups of 2 or 3, and have each group look up one of the following passages:

Philippians 1:15-19 *they prayed for Paul*

Philippians 1:27-30 *they contended and suffered for the faith of the gospel with Paul*

Philippians 2:25-30 *they sent Epaphroditus, and money, to care for Paul's needs. Epaphroditus was a Christians leader - who worked alongside Paul in the gospel*

Philippians 4:10-19 *they sent financial support*

Acts 16:13-15 *Lydia invited them to stay at her home - she provided hospitality*

1. What does the passage tell you about how they were working out their 'partnership in the gospel' practically with Paul? Report your answers back to the larger group.

2. In what ways do you practically work out your partnership in the gospel with missionaries connected with your church?

3. In what ways is this similar to what you see in Philippians? In what ways is it different? Why?