

Confident in Christ

He Who Began a Good Work - Philippians 1:1-11

1. Welcome and Introduction

Leader introduction

Paul's letter to the Philippians is unusual. It doesn't begin with Paul correcting a major problem or defending his authority. Instead, it begins with warmth, affection and gratitude.

Paul remembers this church with joy because there is a deep relationship between them. Ten years earlier, the church had begun in extraordinary circumstances - Lydia by the river, a young woman who was healed, Paul and Silas in prison, an earthquake and a terrified jailer who came to faith.

Now, ten years later, Paul is writing to them from another prison.

And yet his confidence is not shaken.

Philippians 1:6

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Opening question

When you think about your Christian journey so far, what word would you use to describe it?

For example:

- A journey
- A struggle
- An adventure
- A process
- A work in progress
- A transformation
- Something else

Leader note: Don't rush to spiritualise this. Allow people to describe their experience honestly. The phrase "work in progress" can be a helpful bridge into the passage.

2. The Story Behind the Letter

Read Acts 16:6-15 and Acts 16:22-34

You don't necessarily need to read every verse aloud. The leader can briefly retell the story if the group knows it.

Paul and his companions originally intended to travel elsewhere, but the Holy Spirit redirected them. Paul then received the vision of a man calling them to Macedonia.

They arrived in Philippi and found Lydia by the river. God opened her heart and she became a follower of Jesus.

Then everything went wrong.

Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. Yet at midnight they were praying and singing hymns.

An earthquake opened the prison doors. The jailer assumed the prisoners had escaped and was about to take his own life. Paul stopped him.

The jailer asked:

┆ "What must I do to be saved?"

He and his household came to faith and were baptised.

This is how the church in Philippi began.

Discuss

1. Looking at the story in Acts 16, where can you see God taking the initiative?

Possible answers might include:

- God redirected Paul's plans.
- Paul received the vision of Macedonia.
- God opened Lydia's heart.
- God intervened in the prison.

- God used Paul and Silas' suffering and worship to reach the jailer.

2. What does this story tell us about how God can work through circumstances that don't initially make sense?

Leader note: The point isn't that every difficult circumstance is directly caused by God. Rather, the Philippian story demonstrates that God is able to work through unexpected circumstances and even opposition to accomplish His purposes.

3. "He Who Began..."

Return to Philippians 1:6:

┆ "He who began a good work in you..."

The first thing Paul wants us to recognise is that **God started the work.**

The church in Philippi was God's idea from beginning to end.

That was true corporately, but Paul also applies this personally.

Our faith is not ultimately a project we started ourselves. God drew us towards Himself.

Read John 6:44

┆ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them."

Discuss

3. Think about your own story. What people, circumstances, conversations or experiences did God use to begin drawing you towards Himself?

Allow people to share stories if they are comfortable.

4. How does it change the way you see your faith when you realise that God was at work before you fully recognised what He was doing?

Leader reflection

There can be a danger in thinking of Christianity as something we have achieved.

"I decided to become a Christian."

"I've managed to keep going."

"I've become a better person."

But Paul's emphasis is different.

God began the work.

That should produce humility and gratitude rather than pride.

4. "...Will Carry It On"

The second part of the verse is just as important:

| "He who began a good work in you **will carry it on...**"

God doesn't start something and then abandon it.

Christian maturity is not about reaching a point where God is no longer needed. The Christian life is an ongoing process of transformation.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18

| "We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

Discuss

5. What does the phrase "being transformed" suggest about the Christian life?

6. In what ways do you think God has changed you since you first became a Christian?

You might consider:

- Character
- Attitudes
- Relationships
- Priorities
- Generosity
- Forgiveness
- Compassion

- Courage
- Prayer
- Trust
- How you respond to difficult circumstances

7. Are there areas of your life where you sometimes become frustrated because you aren't yet the person you want to be? How might Philippians 1:6 change how you view those areas?

Leader note

There is an important balance here.

Philippians 1:6 isn't an excuse for spiritual complacency. We are called to follow Jesus, grow, pray, serve, repent and change.

But our growth doesn't ultimately depend on our ability to transform ourselves.

God is at work in us.

The question is not, "Have I arrived?"

The answer to that is clearly no.

The better question is, "Am I allowing God to continue His work in me?"

5. "...Until the Day of Christ Jesus"

Paul doesn't just say God will continue His work for a while.

There is a destination.

┃ "...until the day of Christ Jesus."

Paul's vision is bigger than simply getting through life.

God's purpose is ultimately **complete transformation**.

Read Philippians 3:20-21

┃ "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Discuss

8. How does knowing where the Christian journey is heading affect the way we live today?

9. What difference does it make to know that God's goal isn't simply to help us cope with life, but to ultimately transform us completely?

Leader reflection

The Christian life has a direction.

We aren't wandering aimlessly.

God began the work.

God continues the work.

God will complete the work.

That gives us hope, particularly when we feel that progress is slow or when circumstances are difficult.

6. Confidence in God, Not Ourselves

Go back to the opening words of verse 6:

┆ **"Being confident of this..."**

Paul is writing from prison.

He has experienced beatings, imprisonment, opposition, shipwrecks and danger. Yet his confidence remains.

Why? Because his confidence isn't based on circumstances.

And it isn't ultimately based on the Philippians' performance.

It is based on **God's faithfulness**.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

┆ "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it."

Discuss

10. What tends to shake your confidence in God?

11. What is the difference between confidence in yourself and confidence in God's faithfulness?

12. How might your response to failure, disappointment or uncertainty change if your confidence rests primarily in what God is doing rather than what you are able to do?

Leader note

This can be a particularly important moment for people who feel they are "not good enough" Christians.

The gospel does not say:

"God started something in you, now make sure you finish it."

It says:

"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion."

Our confidence is ultimately in **Him**.

7. From Confidence to Response - 3 minutes

There is a danger that we hear Philippians 1:6 and conclude:

"If God is going to finish the work anyway, I don't need to do anything."

But Paul doesn't think that way.

Immediately after the opening section he calls the Philippians to action:

Read Philippians 1:27

| "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

God's faithfulness doesn't produce passivity.

It produces response.

Because God is at work in us, we can stand firm, grow, serve, persevere and live differently.

We don't work so that God will finish His work.

We respond because God is already at work.

8. Personal Reflection and Prayer [*if there's time*]

Return to the three response questions from the end of the sermon:

What has God said to you?

Take a couple of minutes of silence.

Ask people to think about:

- What has God been highlighting?
- Is there something from Scripture?
- Is there an area where God is inviting change?
- Is there something He has been saying repeatedly?
- Is there an encouragement you need to receive?

What are you going to do about it?

Encourage people to identify **one specific response**.

Not: "I need to pray more."

But perhaps: "I am going to spend ten minutes in prayer before I look at my phone each morning."

Not: "I need to forgive them."

But: "I am going to begin praying for that person every day and ask God to help me take the next step towards forgiveness."

The aim is a practical next step.

Who do you need to help you?

Christian growth was never intended to happen alone.

Paul's relationship with the Philippians is itself an example of this. They supported him, prayed for him, encouraged him and stood with him in difficult circumstances.

Ask:

Who could pray with you?

Who could encourage you?

Who could hold you accountable?

Who could help you take the next step?

Close in prayer together