Matthew, servant of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Eagle Ridge, with the leaders and volunteers: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

\*Pause\*

Good morning! What an interesting way to greet people, isn’t it? We’ll get more into that in a bit, but first I’ll stick with our culturally “normal” way of greeting everyone: Hi, my name is Matt Chesney and I am the director of outreach and student ministries here at Eagle Ridge. We are so glad that you are with us today whether you are here in person, online, or at our sister campus in Beaverton!

Also, Happy New Year! 2021 is here! Which means we can expect… well, more of the same that we got from 2020 and before that: lol, suffering in a broken world and yet blessed continually by a loving God who gives us everything that we need.

And THAT is exactly why us starting a study on the book of Philippians is so exciting for me personally. It provides much needed perspective, love, and encouragement to people that are suffering by someone who is also suffering!

But, before we get into that and starting digging into this new series I want to make sure that everyone has one of these awesome little journals. If you are here in Midland or at Beaverton, just raise your hand if you need one and we’ll make sure you get one! And if you are watching online from home – whether that is a couple miles down the road or on the other side of the world – just let us know and we’ll get you one too! These are our gift to you and we only ask that you use them during this series. They are laid out so that one journal contains the entire book of Philippians – not much to it is there? – and the verses are on the left with space for notes on the right. There is no wrong way to take notes! You can highlight, underline, write key ideas down, reminders to yourself about what God said to you in that moment, anything! But, I would encourage you to try to answer these questions as you read:

1. What is God saying to me?
2. What do I need to do about it?
3. What help do I need?

So, without further delay, let’s start chatting about this book that we’re going to be studying. And so you know, I have two purposes for today: First, I want to set the stage so to speak for the entire series – provide the context for all the other sermons that will follow this one. Second, we have a chunk of book that we are going to look at in particular to get started with.

The “book” of Philippians really isn’t a book at all – that’s just what we call the different sections of the Bible. It is actually a letter. More specifically, it is a very personal letter from Paul to the church he planted in Philippi while he was in prison in Rome.

Philippi was a city in Macedonia (modern day Greece) which was taken over by the Romans in their quest to rule the world. So, even though the people of the surrounding region spoke Greek and had many Greek customs, Philippi itself was a Roman city and almost all the people that lived there were descendants of the Roman soldiers that conquered it. This is important because it influenced the culture and pre-existing beliefs of the people that lived there. The people of this city were extremely patriotic and nationalistic. They believed that their ruler was a god, who at the time was Nero. So the idea of worshipping a man as god wasn’t foreign to them… but they persecuted the early Christ followers because they worshipped the wrong one!

Paul planted a church there when he found that some women were worshipping the Hebrew God outside the gate and taught them about Jesus. From that moment on, they became some of his most loyal supporters and fiercest proponents of spreading the Gospel to others. In addition, while he is in prison they send him food and money to help him survive and pray for his release. For these reason and others, Paul feels deeply connected to this church and loves them greatly. So, he sends this letter back with the person who delivered the supplies as a thank you and encouragement for their efforts. But he does SO MUCH MORE than that!

Inside this short letter there is more theology and biblical truth than we can imagine. Some of our favorite verses come from this letter but we often divorce them from their context. Verses like:

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

Understanding the context behind these sentences and they “why” behind Paul’s words is so important. Which we will do throughout this series in some ways… but these verses are not the point. Paul didn’t write this letter to give us a bunch of one-liners to quote at each other when the situation arises or to put on a pillow. In fact, he didn’t write this letter for us at all! He wrote it to a group of believers that he loved deeply – but God inspired it, used it, and amplified it to propel his message forward.

So, let’s read the section we are going to focus on for today:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:1-11

Wow! So amazing. Guys, this is just the introduction to the letter – but this could easily have been the whole thing! He says SO much here, and we just do not have the time to dig into it all. But maybe you can dig a little deeper in your Bridge groups? Let me give you a head start:

Paul opens this letter in a very traditional way for the time period. The idea of introducing yourself first and then identifying who the letter is to, was the norm back then. And Paul does this…. But he radically changes the normal approach in subtle ways to provide some DEEP theological messages and prepare his readers for the message that is to come.

Notice that Paul provides the title of “servant” for himself. This word is actually the word used for slaves in Paul’s time. In his other letters to the Romans and Titus, he calls himself a servant as well, but then follows that with a more formal title of “apostle of Jesus Christ.” He does not do that here. He is preparing them for his message of living humbly for Christ by being the example for them. He then greets the others with titles and makes it clear that he is speaking to ALL of them, not just key leaders. This is also important because later he is going to discuss the issue of unity in the church.

He does this several other times just in these opening paragraphs – he hints at or demonstrates – much larger theological concepts while just saying “Hi guys, I miss you! Thanks!” in a casual way.

Now, I have to admit, I have an advantage here – which is why I know these things before some of you. I’ve looked ahead. I know the focus of Paul’s letter. So, here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to cheat a bit. I’m going to let you in on the secret so you can do what I did – and make some connections. This entire letter focuses around a very important poem in chapter 2. So, let’s jump ahead and read that! So, this poem is written by Paul about Jesus. And sums up the entire Gospel message in a pretty short and easy to understand way.

“Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Philippians 2:6-11

And that is it! Everything in this letter points directly to that poem – and more specifically, to the story of Jesus.

This letter is about:

1. Christian Unity! (but not at the expensive of changing the gospel)
2. Despite great suffering there is joy!
3. Gods Grace vs human works as it relates to Salvation
4. How Christ followers should engage the world

So I have a plea for you. A prayer so to speak. It echoes Paul’s prayer at the end of his introduction. He said:

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

If you lean into this - if you want to join Jesus’ story - this could be one of the most transformational times of your life. This short letter has so much in terms of theological meaning. Your love with abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment. But, like all things, you will reap what you sow. The more you put into this, the more you will get out of it. The more you embrace what God is saying to you, the more you are positioning yourself for the Holy Spirit to transform your life. And THAT is what this series is all about. That is our hope for all of you! That you will recognize that Jesus’ story is ongoing. And you have the choice to join Jesus’ story. You have the opportunity to position yourself for the holy spirit to transform your life.

**Levels of engagement....**

Just come on Sundays

Read it.

Memorize it

Reflect on it

Talk with others about it

Engage with it.

“Position yourself for the holy spirit to transform your life”

**Steps of Obedience**

1. Be here

2. Read the book in one sitting

3. Read it chunk by chunk as we go

4. Memorize the poem (feed on it)

5. Join or participate in a Bridge groups