

Spiritual Partners (Eph 6:21-24)

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[0 : 00] But that's the theme of the series, and we've been very privileged to do that through the book of Ephesians. But shall we pray, and let's have God speak to us through his word.

Father, we ask now that you would open our eyes to see wondrous things in your word. These are not just words on a page. These are life-giving words from you.

We even read last week that this is the sword of the Spirit, and so would you cut us deep? If we need to be cut, would you encourage us if we need encouragement? And would you strengthen us through your truth and your word?

We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. The 24th of February, 2016. Can anyone remember what they were doing that day?

No? Maybe. Was there a birthday around there? It was actually a really important day in world history. Okay. About five years ago. This was the day when Facebook decided to go from just one reaction, the like button, and released a whole range of other reactions.

[1 : 08] They announced this on the 24th of February. So before, you just go on Facebook, and if you didn't like something, it was very hard to know what to do. Okay. All right. All right.

I want to say I don't like this, but there's nothing else except for a like button. What do you do? Right? And so they actually field tested this. They actually did a lot of research. Facebook changes things a lot, but this actually took two years to perfect, and they thought, which are the six most key reactions that people need?

And so they released that on the 24th of February. And in just a few years, right, we've had to relearn kind of how we chat and how we use Facebook, how we, our customs and conventions when we go on this platform.

Right? Because there is a time and place to use a thumbs up, and there's a time and place to use a heart. Right? Okay. You don't just heart anything and everything. Okay? If there's, you know, if there's someone, one of your friends, your girlfriend, who's posted something, there's going to be lots of hearts on there.

Right? You're just going to pile in. But if you're a guy, you've got to be careful. Don't just put a heart anywhere. Right? You've got to be careful. If you don't know the person well, you can't just heart things or wow things.

[2 : 16] Maybe it's just a bit of a formal like first, and then when you get closer, maybe you get deeper into each other's, you know, relationship-wise, then you can change it. Right? You know when to blast something in a group chat, and, you know, we've got all kinds of conventions, don't we, when we talk with each other?

You know when to blast something. You know when that caps lock is not a good thing to use. Okay? It sounds like you're shouting. You know when it's polite not to say anything at all. And in many cultures, right?

Some of you grew up in different cultures. You know that there are customs. How to speak properly. There are certain phrases and words when you speak to maybe a work colleague. But when you speak to a friend, you're going to use different phrases.

When you speak to your auntie or uncle, it's going to be a different tone and register. If it's your granddad, okay, all right? Whole new ball game. Might be a different language. There's professional speech. All right?

There's gaming speech. There's close friend speech. And letter writing, okay, in the first century was full of these kinds of conventions. We just read the last few words of a letter.

[3 : 18] It's easy to forget, right? After we've looked so deeply into this letter from Paul to the Ephesians, right? That, you know, it's easy to forget. We were reading God's word.

But actually, this was also a letter. And in these last few sentences that Alana read out, all right, Paul basically just follows a very standard way of ending a letter. He was just following the standard custom of ending a letter.

Some final remarks and then a wish for the readers. In much the same way as our work emails end with, you know, kind regards or cheers or whatever you guys put in your emails, Paul has no reason to do something different, all right?

He's going to follow the convention. And yet Paul, as we learned last week, is writing also as an ambassador, a herald, a spokesperson of Jesus Christ.

And so these are some powerful final greetings. They are rich with encouragement, even for us today. So this is a pretty short talk. I call this one Spiritual Partners, okay, because I think that's kind of the theme we see in these last few verses.

[4 : 22] And no surprise, since all throughout this letter, Paul has preached about unity in Christ. We've heard that through all our three services. He's prayed for humility and patience as we love one another, as we go deeper into his love.

So all I want to do for the next couple of minutes is just make three quick observations about spiritual partnerships. Okay? Three final thoughts as we finish, maybe forever, the book of Ephesians.

So, and then we're going to spend, hopefully, in time in your groups, if you choose to join us afterwards, reflecting on what God has taught us through this letter. All right?

So three final thoughts. Firstly, I think we see, all right, verse 21, Paul is not indispensable, right? Because, yeah, we realize he needs Tychicus.

Sometimes, I think, when we read a letter like this, we can think Paul is a bit of a superhero. I don't know if you've followed his story in maybe some of the other books of the Bible. Okay? He's the apostle, right, who got that really dramatic conversion story.

[5 : 25] We can read that in Acts chapter 9. Okay? Literally stopped in his tracks by Jesus. He's the missionary who stands up to, yeah, to the Pharisees and other religious leaders.

He has to run away from them because they're chasing him from town to town to town. His letters to the church, the early church, they make up half of our New Testament, the second half of our Bibles, right?

Paul's a big deal. Sometimes we can start to then put this guy, Paul, on a pedestal, right? Paul's this kind of Christian. And yet, I think if we look closer, this verse reminds us that at every step of his travels, okay, Paul has been accompanied by friends all along, okay?

If you think broadly, okay, if we think about Paul's story in the Bible, have a think about it, right? I'll remind you. In Acts chapter 13, okay, Paul, it says, and his companions sailed on to Perga and Pamphylia where John left them to return to Jerusalem, okay?

As he starts his missionary work, he is with friends. When he's preaching the gospel, he's not alone, right? Many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, right, who were talking with them and urging them to continue in the grace of God.

[6 : 37] What about the time when Paul is bullied and arrested, put in prison, okay, persecuted? He's not alone. It's always with someone else, right? Paul and Silas are the ones who are being attacked by the crowd and beaten and stripped.

And then when he first arrives at Ephesus, okay, the people who receive this letter, he's not alone, right? Acts 18 tells us when they arrived at Ephesus, actually, Paul was traveling with Priscilla and Aquila, and then they got left behind and they did something else.

And when Paul leaves Ephesus two years later, right, he actually picks up a couple of friends and they go on a road trip together. Acts 20, verse 3 to 4 tells us, look, look who he picks up.

He picks up Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. Tychicus, right, hard to pronounce, like a lot of Asian names, I think.

I want to make a correction, obviously, like, you know, when it says Asia in the Bible, it's thinking really about as far as Turkey, kind of, so not as far as where we, our ancestors are from.

[7 : 41] But Tychicus, it sounds like, this is the first time we hear him in the Bible. It sounds like he was possibly, I think, actually someone who came from Ephesus, because in another part of the Bible, he's actually named with Trophimus and actually says Trophimus the Ephesian.

So it's quite possible they were buddies and they were from the city. And by the time Paul writes these final words, though, right, Tychicus isn't just some random person, right, not some random

Asian, but he is actually, verse 21, a beloved brother and a faithful servant.

That's special, isn't it? All right? All this time we thought that this was a letter from Paul, he's the one doing all the heavy lifting. But all this while, he has had a friend to help him along.

Okay? It's quite possible that because Paul was in prison, who else could write his letter? Who else could send it out? It was Tychicus, his good mate. Paul knows, I think, that ministry is not a one-man job.

I think we've been reminded of that a lot this service, haven't we? I think one reason I think this letter, actually, compared to other letters in the Bible, is quite vague about personal details, is that Paul really trusts that Tychicus is going to update them, right?

[9:01] Tychicus will tell you everything. All right? I'm not going to write anymore, I'm just going to leave it to this guy, my buddy. He's going to update you. Behind every Paul, right, riding up a storm with Ephesians, there is a Tychicus helping, helping.

Behind every upfront speaker that you hear on Sunday, or worship leader, there is a faithful AV team, right? There are diligent ushers. There is a powerful prayer group, ministries like that. Behind every deacon or department leader that stands up the front and holds a candle. There is a prayerful spouse. There are supportive family. There is a committee and volunteers. Ministry is not a one-person job.

It is a team effort. Even behind every curious non-Christian that walks through these doors, right? Or picks up a Bible or starts a conversation. There has been an army of friends, hasn't there, right? They have been loving them, trying to love them like Jesus, trying to open up conversations, answer their questions, give them reasons to find out more. And we need to remember this, I think, at PCBC.

[10:07] Remember that ministry, when we serve Jesus, it is not like playing, I don't know, like singles badminton, right? It's either you can do it or you can't. It's not like solving a Rubik's Cube. You have the skills or you don't, okay?

Ministry is a team game. You may be tempted, perhaps, one day to start a project, make a change in this church, maybe take an idea forward all by yourself.

But that's not how Christian ministry works. Because in Christ, we need spiritual partners, okay?

We need our friendship of each other. We need to serve one another.

We need each other's advice and even critique and challenge. You can try. You can try and force yourself to run with an idea or to serve all by yourself.

But sooner or later, you'll become bitter. You'll become alone. You'll become burnt out. Maybe you'll just become discouraged and then stop serving altogether. We need each other, right? Very simple fact.

[11:04] Paul reminds us of this. Paul, we thank God, was used in big ways, but he is not indispensable. He needed Tychicus, many other sisters and brothers, and so do we.

Second observation. Look, too, in these final words, right? I think when we read verse 22, we see the church is not self-sufficient, okay?

Because it needs personal encouragement. Let me read verse 22 again. It says this. Paul's writing, obviously. I'm sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage you.

In English, there's a bit of a saying. There's a saying that goes like this. When you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail. I don't know what the Chinese equivalent is.

So, for example, if you love to teach, right? Maybe if you're a teacher, you'll think that all of life's problems, all of society's problems will be solved if we have more teachers, right? If you love maybe worship, right?

[12:06] Okay? You'll think that the way to solve all the problems of the church is to have more worship nights, right? To do everything that way. If you're a bit of a carer, right? We just need more caring with each other. Everyone, you know, we all have kind of our gifts and our strengths, right?

If you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Well, which is why I find it interesting that Paul, as he writes this, he is realizing that his letter, his teaching ministry is not enough, right?

Paul, okay, don't get me wrong. Paul's teaching ministry has been vital for the Ephesians church.

We have benefited from it all through this term, haven't we, right? The Ephesian church needed everything that Paul has written, okay?

They needed to know that they are blessed in Christ with the Father's love, the Son's forgiveness, the Spirit's guarantee, right? The Ephesians needed to know they have fullness in him to pray big prayers, and that they were once dead in their sins but saved by grace through faith in Christ. The Ephesians needed to know, right, that Jesus has not just saved us, he has broken down hostile groups and broken down the war between them and united us with each other.

[13:16] And that he calls us to share this amazing news of reconciliation with our world. And how do we do that? The Ephesians needed to know that it was through walking in unity and maturity and holiness and love as light in our world.

And it happened in all kinds of places, not just here on Sundays, but in our workplace, in our studies, in our families, in our marriages. All these things pointing to Jesus.

The Ephesians needed to know all this, okay? So the preaching, the teaching has been so important. Yet Paul the preacher, Paul the missionary, by writing verse 22, knows that preaching is not enough, okay?

Because here, here, he wants Tychicus to be more than just a postman, right? It's not just that he wants him to deliver a letter, right, this letter.

He actually wants them to know how he is and to encourage their hearts. Because Paul can teach them and he can pray for them for a distance.

[14:22] But sometimes, in ministry, you need to make that personal connection. There needs to be a personal touch, right? John Stott, an author, puts it this way, okay?

Prayer, writing to one another, and visits, they're still the three key ways by which Christians and churches enrich each other and build up the body of Christ.

I don't know how often you guys listen to maybe a celebrity preacher, right? Maybe you have a favorite speaker that you just download their podcast or you look up their latest YouTube message or clip.

It's one thing to hear from a celebrity preacher, right, that Jesus loves you. It's entirely different when it's from your best mate and you're sharing a meal together, isn't it? Sometimes, some things, some good news, it's best heard in person.

It's a personal touch. And so I think Paul knows this. He's already asked a prayer for himself. We heard that last week. But here, I take that his more personal requests and needs, they're going to come straight from Tychicus himself, okay, the person who carries his message.

[15:32] And so we need to remember this. Yes, let's build each other up by hearing God's Word taught faithfully. Let's pray like Paul has prayed in this book. But we also need to see each other in person, not just on Sunday.

We've got to catch up with people at work, right? Invite them to our house. Some of these ways that will help each other is to do it over coffee or dinner. With God's truth at the ready, yes, but in a personal relationship, okay?

God's way has always been God's Word and relationship and gospel growth. There's never been any other way. I know church will survive without personal contact, time together, word and relationship.

So we're not indispensable, okay? We need spiritual partners in ministry, and we are not self-sufficient. We need personal encouragement from one another as a church family. And I think finally, last two verses, we're reminded that our world is not peaceful, and we need a deeper love. So as last final words go, it's quite something, isn't it? Here is Paul's final wish for his readers, us included. He wants his readers to have, we read here, peace and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[16:55] These are all words he's already used in the letter. Remember chapter 2, Paul talks about how Jesus is our peace. Ephesians 2.14. He is the wall divider.

He preached peace himself. And in our world that is lacking peace, Paul reminds us only Jesus can bring true peace. Notice 2 in verse 23, how Paul connects peace with love and faith, okay?

They all go together, don't they? A genuine faith and trust in God will shape who we are, will make us peaceful people, okay?

Have you ever met someone that was just so peaceful that the more you talk to them, the more you realize, actually, that's because they're a Christian. This happens day after day, right?

When we know the love of God through his son Jesus, the spirit will change our hearts, mold us, make us more loving, more peaceful people. And we shouldn't be surprised either, right, that in

verse 24 we read this, grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

[18 : 06] We see Paul link grace with love. Just as peace flows out from an undying love, grace is the reason why we have it.

Grace is a very easy word to define. It is God's free gift to us. And in the gospel, it is at Christ's expense. The only reason we gather today is because God has graciously, without us deserving any of it, given his beloved son for us.

The shame that Jesus experienced when he died on the cross, when he was shamed, right, gives us honor with our heavenly father. The betrayal that Jesus faced on Good Friday is able to restore us with a holy God.

Grace is connected with love. This is precisely, I think, why Paul ends the letter actually exactly the way he starts. Okay? Paul's letter first started, okay, grace and peace, right, to the saints who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now he ends with grace and peace. Shaped by a father who, in love, chose us and will keep us. And love is a funny thing, isn't it?

[19 : 20] Everyone's very excited that youth camp's going to be all about love. But love, if you think about it, makes no sense if there is a world without God. Why have love?

Why have love? There's no real reason for it, really. Okay? The fact that we love deeply and long for love deeply, I think is a sign we are, at least part of us, is more than just atoms and molecules. We are more than flesh and blood. We are built for love. And yet our love, I think, has been poisoned. It's been infected. It's been stained with our selfish desires, hasn't it?

We love out of a need to prove ourselves. Or our love is fickle. It comes and goes, depending on how the other person responds to us. Maybe it is distracted.

It keeps going to the latest thing. We have so many ways where we love and we pour our love into people or things who can never fully fill this God-sized hole in our hearts.

[20 : 26] And yet verse 24 reminds us, In Jesus, there is a love that is undying, incorruptible, like water that would never run out, like endless light for our darkness.

Deep love found in Jesus, right? Love as you watch him teach and learn about his healing ministry, his amazing spotless life, the way he loved and served other people.

We read about Jesus' love that it would suffer scorn and shame and abuse for your sins, for your filth. Love that would give up one's life, that you might have life to the full with no guilt or shame.

Love is a funny thing, but that is true love. And if you haven't already, if you're still searching for a love that you can't quench, you can't satisfy, can I encourage you?

Turn to this love. Turn to this undying love. You can even do it today. Choose the path that leads to life. Receive a love that you've always longed for, but never had.

[21 : 39] John 3.16 sums it up this way. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Undying love. Love so big that as you draw on it, as you mimic it, as you are refreshed by it, you're going to have more love to share with others. It's not a zero-sum game. You're just going to be more loving because you're loved yourself.

A while back, we're wrapping things up now. Someone asked a question on Slido, right? And the question was this, how is the church of Ephesus doing today?

Given they were enlightened, they got this letter, they were built up in Paul's time. And the best way to answer this is to turn, I think, to the next time we hear about the Ephesians, in the book of Revelation, chapter 2.

Revelation is a letter, written much later, from another guy, the Apostle John. And in it, he writes to seven different churches. It's about probably 29, 30 years later.

[22 : 45] So imagine, you know, a generation older, Christians in Ephesus, are receiving a letter from John. The language that John uses is a little bit dreamlike, but it's still fairly clear.

So let me read Revelation 2 to you. And it says this. This is John writing down the words of Jesus. To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write this.

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance.

I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first.

[23 : 52] If you don't repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. If you have this in your favor, you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life. Which is the paradise of God. Verse 4 especially is powerful, isn't it?

Yet I hold this against you. You could actually translate it. Forsaken, you could translate it as divorced. Or left, abandoned, the love you had at first.

You see, friends, it is one thing to be a church that just holds on to the truth, like the Ephesians probably did. It sounds like they did. For generation to generation.

Praise God for faithful pastors and leaders who keep a church going from generation to generation. Praise God for those faithful pastors and leaders who have kept PCBC free from false teaching.

[24 : 53] And thank you, Father, for every faithful Sunday school teacher, every Christian friend who has helped this church along the way. And yet, we must never lose sight of our first love, Jesus.

Because every church is only a generation away from forgetting about him. From abandoning him. And from having our lights put out.

We must never take it for granted that we will last another 30 years. So we must, when we need to, repent. Turn back to Jesus, our first love. And today, there may not be a building, a church building left from this church that Paul wrote to.

But we know that church isn't a building, is it? It's God's people. His body, his dwelling place, his army gathered together or scattered across the world.

Throughout all history, living lives of grace and peace. Fueled by love. Assured by the Spirit. Loved by the Father. Following our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

[26 : 01] And so by God's grace, with his peace, let's keep going deeper into his love. Let's pray. Father, we love because you loved us first.

And so we thank you for your son, Jesus. Would you really open the way for us if we are sitting here and holding out against you? Soften our hearts to receive the love of Jesus Christ.

To see him there on the cross. Loving us. Arms outstretched. Dying for our sins. Help us to turn away from chasing love in the wrong places.

And to trust you. And for all of us, would you help us, even as we leave this letter behind, to keep going deeper into your love. And to never forget our first love, Jesus.

Gracias. God bless you. 6 am. God bless you. Thanks. Thanks. Princess. Comment ■ Islam. Love God bless you. God bless you. Thanks.

[27 : 10] bumper Mob ■■■ DAY Feed Hall. Loving us. Tell heavens we love you. What wish you can to ■ le jest. For no reason is Frozen to be the Lord. God bless you. It has been a great place. Build no reason is not to make o well. And to go places Zombie and I think this place for you. Somebody has given you some reason is to Find. And to come to do the truth.

Why did we buy you? It has been a new place. Apple Christmas. Here it has made me so much fun. And to go.