

## Rethinking Your Identity

### A Study of Philippians 1:1-2

Characteristic of Completeness: Christian Life

Big Idea: Knowing who you are turns afflictions into assignments.

Related Scriptures: John 1:12; 8:42-44; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 7:22; Galatians 3:26; 4:4-6; Colossians 3:24

Introduction:

- A. What do you do when the joy has leaked out of your life?

Sometimes there's a precipitating event. Like the loss of a loved one. Or the loss of a job.

Sometimes you can't point to anything. The joy leaked out somewhere along the line, but you don't know how or why. You just find yourself empty and dry. You've lost your sense of Christian joy and you are sorely tempted to abandon the struggle to live right.

- B. This morning we are going to begin a study of the book of Philippians. It's a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the believers in the church at Philippi. One of the main reasons Paul writes to the Philippians is because, for them, the joy had leaked out of life. Let me set the stage.

1. In ► AD 51 or 52<sup>1</sup>, on his second missionary journey, Paul traveled from the ► city of Antioch to the city of Troas in Asia Minor.<sup>2</sup> Paul traveled with his fellow missionaries, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. At Troas, Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."<sup>3</sup> The missionary team took it that God wanted them to go to Macedonia to preach the gospel.<sup>4</sup> So they ► sailed to Europe and their first stop was the Macedonian city of Philippi.<sup>5</sup>

In Philippi, on the Sabbath, the missionaries began sharing the gospel. A woman named Lydia was the first to believe in Jesus for eternal life. Lydia, in turn, led her whole household to believe in Jesus, and thus, a church was born in Philippi.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 15; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2ed. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1992, 2005), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 15:36-16:8.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 16:9.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 16:10.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 16:11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 16:13-15.

In the early days of the new church, Timothy, a young man on the missionary team, developed a special bond with the Philippian believers.<sup>7</sup> I imagine Timothy's relationship with the Philippian church was a lot like Lorne Zelyck's relationship with Moon Valley Bible Church. He was there from the beginning and won their hearts.

After many days, Paul and his team resumed their missionary journey, leaving Luke behind in Philippi to lead the new church.<sup>8</sup>

Several years later, Paul visited Philippi again on a third missionary journey.<sup>9</sup> Several years after that, some Jewish opponents managed to get Paul arrested on trumped up charges, and Paul was eventually transferred ► to Rome, where he was imprisoned.

The Philippians heard of Paul's imprisonment and dispatched a messenger, Epaphroditus, with a monetary gift to help Paul. This testifies to the significant generosity and commitment of the Philippian believers.

But even committed believers can struggle when the joy leaks out. Along with the monetary gift, it seems that Epaphroditus also carried a request from the Philippians to Paul. They asked Paul to send them Timothy so he could help them find their way back to joy.<sup>10</sup> You see, somewhere along the line, the joy had leaked out of life within the Philippian church and they needed help.

In ► 2 Corinthians 8:2, Paul tells us that the Philippian believers were experiencing "a great ordeal of affliction" and were suffering "deep poverty." The Greek word for ► "affliction" literally describes a pressing or a pressure—a pressure that produces distress, oppression, affliction, and tribulation—a pressure that can squeeze the joy right out of you.<sup>11</sup>

One scholar, ► Moisés Silva, describes their situation this way:

*The Philippians themselves . . . were undergoing some serious difficulties. ► Opponents of the Christian community were causing great alarm in the congregation . . . (Phil. 1:27-30; 3:2; 3:2, 18-19). ► Physical needs were producing anxiety among members, who had begun to wonder whether their Christian faith was capable of sustaining them (Phil. 4:6, 19). ► [These] factors combined to create disagreements, distrust, and a poisonous spirit of self-seeking*

<sup>7</sup> Silva, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Silva, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 20:1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Silva, 4.

<sup>11</sup> W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. "θλιψις," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

*(Phil. 2:1-4). ► The leadership of the church . . . had fallen into the sin of dissension, and the general health of the church had deteriorated considerably (Phil. 2:14-16; 4:2-3).<sup>12</sup>*

*► . . . the Philippians were facing great adversity, had lost their sense of Christian joy, and were tempted to abandon their struggle.<sup>13</sup>*

When ► Paul heard that his Philippian friends were struggling in this way, no doubt he wanted to come to their aid, but he was imprisoned. So, he writes them a letter, explaining that he plans to send Timothy soon, and he explains how they can deal with their struggle—how they can get back their joy. It's the letter known as Philippians in our Bibles. Paul wrote it around AD 61.<sup>14</sup> So the Philippian church was not more than ten years old. It was a fairly young church like Moon Valley.

2. Woven throughout Paul's letter to the Philippians is the theme of rethinking, suggesting that, when we find that the joy has leaked out of life, we need to rethink some things. We need a paradigm shift. We need to somehow reorient ourselves.

The distinctive theme of rethinking things is evidenced by a variety of words Paul peppers throughout Philippians.

- a. Ten times he uses the word *phro-NEH-o*, meaning to think or to judge.<sup>15</sup> He uses this word more in Philippians than in any other of his twelve letters in the New Testament.
- b. Six times he uses the word, *he-GEH-o-mai*, meaning to think, to consider, to regard.<sup>16</sup> Again he uses this word more in Philippians than in any other of his other letters.
- c. Two times he uses the word, *sko-PEH-o*, meaning to pay careful attention.<sup>17</sup> Again he uses this word more in Philippians than in any other of his other letters.
- d. Two times he uses the word, *lo-GIDZ-o-mai*, meaning to think, to ponder, to dwell on.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Silva, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Silva, 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> Carson, 15.

<sup>15</sup> BDAG, s.v. “φρονέω.”

<sup>16</sup> BDAG, s.v. “ἡγέομαι.”

<sup>17</sup> BDAG, s.v. “σκοπέω.”

<sup>18</sup> BDAG, s.v. “λογίζομαι.”

- e. And he uses other words relating to knowing, knowledge, and discernment.

From this we can infer that, when the joy has leaked out, the leak is between our ears. We need to somehow shore up our thinking.

- 3. Our text today is ► Philippians 1:1-2. Here, even in this short, simple introduction, Paul begins to fix the leak by saying some things that indirectly invite us to rethink our identity. He says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Philippians 1:1** Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introductory verses like these are commonly skimmed over as the blah-blah-blah-greetings-whatever part of letters that contain no relevant information for us.

But these are not just throw-away verses. They too, are inspired by God and profitable. In fact, from these two verses, I glean ► four important aspects to rethinking our identity—four truths we need to know or four things we need to be reminded of to begin to find our way back to joy.

Inasmuch as this relates to our understanding of the significance of our position in Christ and His provision for living the Christian life, our Characteristic of Completeness for the week ► is the Christian Life.

- I. Here's the ► first truth about our identity: We are bond-servants. We are slaves.

Yippee! Now doesn't that make you feel joyful all over? Probably not. I got some 'splainin' to do. Let me unpack this idea and show you how it relates to joy.

- A. In Verse 1, Paul introduces himself and his fellow missionary, Timothy, as ► “bond-servants.”

- 1. Bond-servants are people who serve in bondage to another; they're slaves.<sup>19</sup>
- 2. The Greek word for, “bond-servant” is *DEW-loss*. It describes a person under a master's total control.<sup>20</sup> Bond-servants are duty-bound only to their

<sup>19</sup> *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, unabridged ed., s.v. “bondservant.”

<sup>20</sup> BDAG, s.v. “δοῦλος.”

masters.<sup>21</sup> A bond-servant is a person “whose will is swallowed up in the will of another,” and “who serves another to the disregard of his own interests.”<sup>22</sup>

3. Paul and Timothy are bond-servants of Christ Jesus. Christ is their Master. They are sold out to doing whatever the Lord Jesus wants them to do.
- B. I can almost hear someone thinking, “Yes, I can see where Paul and Timothy would consider themselves bond-servants because they’re professionals. They’re missionaries, and Paul is an apostle. They’re supposed to be sold out to Jesus; it’s their job. But where does Paul say that *I* am a bond-servant?”

I’m glad you asked.

1. In ► 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul addresses believers, saying,

<sup>NAU</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:19** Or do you not know . . . that you are not your own? **20** For you have been bought with a price . . .

While we were enslaved to our own sin, Jesus paid the price of our liberation through His death on the cross. When we believe in Jesus for eternal life, His payment is appropriated and we are set free from slavery to sin. Sin is no longer our master. But at the same time, Jesus becomes our new Master. We are His because He bought us with a price.

2. Later in ► 1 Corinthians 7:22, Paul refers to a believer as “Christ’s slave.”
3. Also, in ► Colossians 3:24, Paul says to believers,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Colossians 3:24** . . . It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

So, there’s no getting around the fact that, as believers in Jesus Christ, we are His bond-servants. That’s who we are.

- C. How ► does this relate to joy? Well, let’s rethink this. Joy can give way to bitterness when life does not go the way we want it. It’s largely a matter of expectations. Let’s face it. We expect God to do certain things for us, don’t we? I dare say we sometimes demand that God do certain things. And when God doesn’t deliver, the joy leaks out.

But the problem is not with God; it’s between our ears. As bond-servants we’re in no position to demand anything from our Master. We have no rights whatsoever before God. This is very hard to swallow for those of us who have grown up in a culture characterized by freedom, rights, and entitlement.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Wuest, “Victory Over Indwelling Sin in Romans Six,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 116 (Jan. 1959): 50.

To help us to rethink this, let me quote ► Larry Crabb, a noted Christian counselor and author. Crabb ► says,

*We are a demanding people. . . .*

► *We demand that spouses respond to our needs; ► we demand that our children exhibit the fruit of our godly training; ► we demand that our churches be sensitive to our concerns by providing certain ministries; ► we demand that slow drivers get out of the passing lane; ► we demand that no one hurt us again the way we were hurt before; ► we demand that legitimate pleasures long denied, be ours to enjoy.*

► *How absurd! ► Can you imagine an army where new recruits give orders or a company where errand boys set policy? ► And yet mere people shout orders to the universe. . . .*

► *Wedged tightly in our thirsty soul is the ugly disease of a demanding spirit. . . ► The spirit of demandingness must be identified, recognized in all its ugliness, and abandoned through repentance.*<sup>23</sup>

Interesting that Crabb would use the word “repentance.” It means to change one’s mind, to rethink. Crabb goes on to paraphrase what God is saying to us in His ► Word:

*“I know My ways will seem to ignore your concerns at times. ► I want you to trust Me when you feel unusually tired and I call on you to get up. ► I want you to trust Me when you’re eager to serve and I put you on hold. ► But you will never learn to trust Me until you come to terms with My authority. ► Trust will never emerge from a demanding spirit. ► Let’s start with a clear understanding: I give the orders. You do what you’re told. ► With that as a beginning, you will eventually taste My goodness and the richness of fellowship with Me and come to trust Me deeply.”*<sup>24</sup>

So, ► we are bond-servants. As bondservants, we are to trust our Master and demand nothing. In fact, “to trust God means to demand nothing.”<sup>25</sup> As bond-servants we exist to serve God’s agenda, not our own.

- II. Before I give some real life examples of how we can apply this to our lives, I want introduce ► the second truth about our identity that we need to rethink because it is so closely related to being a bond-servant. Here’s the second thing that’s true of us: ► We are saints.

<sup>23</sup> Larry Crabb, *Inside Out*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988), 143.

<sup>24</sup> Crabb, 146-147.

<sup>25</sup> Crabb, 161.

- A. In ► Verse 1 of our text, Paul says he is writing, “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi.”

Some people use the term, “saints” to describe venerated individuals in church history who have done great things for God. But that’s not how the Bible uses it.

The Greek word is *HA-ghee-os*. It’s a term used to describe every single believer in Jesus, whether or not the believer has done great things for God. If you have believed in Jesus for eternal life, you are a saint. Saint Chuck. Saint Julie. Saint Sandy.

The word *HA-ghee-os*, as it describes a person, literally means the holy one.<sup>26</sup> It describes a person dedicated to the service of God—a person set apart by God for God’s purposes. The idea goes hand-in-hand with being a bond-servant. We believers are bond-servants and saints.

- B. Well, what difference does this make? It makes all the difference.

1. Think of the situation you’re in right now. Your situation may be extremely difficult. You may be suffering the kind of affliction that can squeeze the joy right out of you.

Maybe you’re single and desperately lonely for a soul-mate, a kindred spirit with whom you can share life. When you see happily married couples, it’s a painful reminder of what you don’t have.

Maybe you’re chronically ill and dreadfully tired of the fight. You struggle to even remember what it is like to feel good, and you wonder how much more you can take.

Maybe your job seems like a tiresome waste of life, but there are no good alternatives. You’re stuck. You can’t afford to do anything else. And you feel like just one more financial hiccup might put you over the edge.

Maybe you’ve been deeply hurt in your marriage. Trust has been violated. You want the marriage to work, but you’re scared to death that you’re just going to get hurt again. And you wonder if the fear will ever go away. Will you ever be able to trust again?

Maybe your children are struggling. They’ve made poor choices and now you are experiencing the pain of it. Someone has said that a mother is only doing as well as her least happy child.

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<sup>26</sup> BDAG, s.v. “ἅγιος.”

Maybe you're overwhelmed. It's not one thing; it's everything. It's all pressing in. There's a cloud of anxiety that seems to follow you everywhere. The items on your to-do list multiply faster than your ability to check them off, and you just want to run away.

2. How does it help to know that you are a bond-servant and a saint? Well, as a bond-servant and saint, you can know that in whatever circumstance you're in, no matter how difficult, that is exactly where God wants you to serve Him right now. God has set you apart to serve Him right where you are, right now.

You didn't fall into your circumstances by chance. Your affliction is not accidental; it's providential. The Master wants to use you right where you are. You see, knowing who you really are, knowing that you are a bond-servant, knowing that you are a saint turns afflictions into assignments. In fact, that's ► the big idea of my message this morning: Knowing who you are turns afflictions into assignments.

3. Think of the apostle Paul. He had left everything to serve God as an itinerate preacher and missionary and church planter. But things had not gone smoothly. At the time he wrote the letter to the Philippians, he had been unjustly imprisoned for years. And he was chronically ill.<sup>27</sup> If any situation could ever drain the joy out of you, his could.

Nevertheless, Paul knows that he is a bond-servant and a saint. And so, he views his affliction as an assignment. In ► Philippians 2:7, he says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Philippians 2:17** But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.

I would paraphrase what Paul is saying this way: "If the Master has given me this difficult assignment only so that I may encourage your faith with this letter, I welcome it with joy, even if it eventually costs me my life."

The joy of which Paul speaks is not some giddy, temporary sugar high. It's a deeply satisfying sense that you're on assignment, carrying out the purposes for which the Master created you, anticipating your ultimate victory and reward.

It's the joy of a soldier given the most difficult assignment but also the most important. Your assignment is to go deep behind enemy lines to liberate your friends who are prisoners of war. And your commander has given you everything you need to pull it off. Are you scared? Yes. Is it dangerous? Of

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<sup>27</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:7.

course. Will you get hurt? There's a good chance. Do you feel like throwing a party? No. But is there joy? A joy that is honored to be entrusted with such an assignment? A joy that recognizes that there is no better, no more important thing that you could do than to carry out your assignment well? A joy that realizes that you, in fact, were created for this assignment? Yes. There is joy.

Paul could not see what the Master sees. Paul could only get a glimpse of the possibility that his letter to the Philippians might be an encouragement to their faith. Paul could not see what his Master had in mind, that the letter would eventually make its way into the Bible and encourage the faith of millions over the centuries, including you in this moment.

Paul saw his affliction as an assignment. He had no idea how big the assignment was; all he knew for sure was God was in it and it was hard. No matter. He was a bond-servant, and the assignment came from the Master.

4. Sometimes the life stories of apostles can seem rather inaccessible and bigger than life to us. So let me give an example that's a little closer to home. I want to read you a journal entry from a long-time believer named ► Vivian Felix who was dying of breast cancer. It demonstrates the power of rethinking your identity. On September 19, 1998, she ► writes,

*I started this [journal] to record my journey to wellness. I have not done well by it. But today I am impressed to change it to a record of my spiritual journey.*

This is very significant change. Vivian changed from demanding to be healed of her affliction to humbly accepting it as her assignment, whether or not she is healed. Listen as she ► writes:

*For 21 months I have prayed for healing. I have begged God, badgered, pleaded, wept, screamed, yelled at, tried to manipulate, shamed, reminded ► —every tactic I could think of—and I have expressed every emotion felt by one who is dying of cancer. ► I have prayed for a sign, asked and hoped for a sign that the Lord would heal me. Nothing has come.*

► *All I seem to get is, "Trust me."*

► *Lord, you have heard hundreds and thousands of prayers for me. ► I have accused you of sitting on your throne with your arms folded, disregarding those pleas. ► Forgive me—you know my human flesh and struggles with roller-*

*coaster emotions. ► Sometimes I would like even just a few days of release from the fear and knowledge of cancer.*

*► But I know in my heart that you are good and loving and the giver of peace. ► So now I ask that you turn my mind and my heart from my illness to you. I am ready. “Nothing in my hand I bring, only to the cross I cling.”<sup>28</sup>*

Nine months later, on June 7, 1999, Vivian Felix died. Her assignment on earth is done. She is with the Master. Knowing who you are turns afflictions into assignments.

- III. But it's ► still not very easy to trust the Master with His assignments for us, is it? It's difficult to trust His absolute authority because every human authority we've ever known is flawed and not perfectly trustworthy. Presidents lie. Pastors fall. Earthly parents disappoint. Can we really trust God's assignments for us?

This is where we need to rethink ► a third aspect of our identity: ► God is our Father. Paul says in ► Verse 2,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Philippians 1:2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father . . .

- A. The word, “father” tells us something. The Greek word for, “father” is *pa-TARE*. The root of the word literally means, “nourisher, protector, upholder.”<sup>29</sup> That God would choose this word, “father” to describe Himself to us indicates that God the Father wants us to know that He is our nourisher, our protector, and our upholder.

If that is true of our Father, then what does that say about us, His children? It means we are secure. We are safe. We are provided for. Every child needs security. Our Father provides it, even in the midst of very difficult assignments.

- B. Paul reminds us of this in Verse 2, where he says that our Father is the source of grace and peace. As God's children, we are the recipients of His grace and peace. Let's rethink this.
1. The word ► “grace” describes favor, care, help, goodwill, or generosity that is unearned or unmerited.<sup>30</sup> As children of the Father, we receive this grace from Him. He is always there for us. He is our Provider and Sustainer.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Felix with Rob Wilkins, *The School of Dying Graces: A Journey Toward Intimacy With God*, (US: SaltRiver, an imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 23-24.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “πατήρ” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977),

<sup>30</sup> BDAG, s.v. “χάρις.”

2. The word, ► “peace” describes a general state of well-being.<sup>31</sup> We get peace from the Father, too. Our Father has our best interest at heart. Grace and peace. That’s what we get from Him.
  3. The Father has demonstrated over and over again that He is the ultimate source of grace and peace. He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us. He sent His Holy Spirit to empower us. He has given us every spiritual blessing—everything we need to carry out the assignments He gives.
- C. But, to be perfectly honest, I don’t always feel like I’m getting much grace and peace from the Father. Sometimes I don’t appreciate His assignments at all. They just seem like afflictions to me.

But this is where the Fatherhood of God helps change my thinking. Think with me about the relationship between a father and child on earth.

What happens when an earthly father gives his child an unpleasant assignment or chore to do? Maybe it’s homework. Or mowing the lawn. Or cleaning up.

How does the child see it? Well, it depends on the maturity and attitude of the child, doesn’t it? An immature, disobedient child will whine and carry on about it, question the fairness of it, and do everything possible to get out of it. The child sees it as a needless affliction to be avoided.

And how does the earthly father see it? He sees the assignment as needful. Needful for the family and needful for the maturation of his child. The father knows the pain involved, but he has the bigger picture in mind.

And how does the father respond to the child? It depends.

If, in response to the assignment, the child is rebellious and disrespectful of the father’s authority, a good father may allow the circumstances to become even more unpleasant as a means of healthy discipline. Not to harm, but to break the child of the selfish demandingness that is truly harmful.

If, on the other hand, the child accepts the assignment with a good attitude, but finds the assignment to be difficult or confusing or scary, the good father is there to help, as needed. The father is wide open to the humble expressions of bewilderment and pain and pleas for help from his children. But he’s not about to put up with the disrespectful and arrogant demands of his child to renegotiate the terms of the assignment.

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<sup>31</sup> BDAG, s.v. “εἰρήνη.”

So it is with God our Father. We are His children. We are His bond-servants. We are His saints. When we know who we are, our afflictions turn into assignments.

- IV. That brings us to ► the fourth and final truth about our identity. It's easy to miss. I get it from ► Verse 1, where Paul says he's writing to the saints in Philippi, "including the overseers and deacons."

► "Overseers" and "deacons" are words to describe leaders in the church. We have such leaders at Moon Valley. The overseers are the elders. The deacons include others who serve, even though we haven't given all of them official titles at Moon Valley.

The truth that Paul is pointing out is that ► we are a team. That's the fourth point. We are a team. The term, ► "including" comes from a Greek word that emphasizes a linkage or relationship.<sup>32</sup> Christianity is to be lived out in community. It is a team sport and the local church is the team.

- A. What if I were to go on over to Target dressed in football gear and start introducing myself to people as a professional football player?

After the laughter died down, people might play along and ask, "What position do you play?"

Then I'd pump my arm a couple of times and say, "I'm a quarterback."

And then they'd ask, "What team do you play for?"

And I'd say, "Well, I'm not really into *organized* football. I don't actually play for, like, a team. I play by myself."

People would think I'm delusional.

From a biblical point of view, it is just as delusional to think that I can successfully live the Christian life in isolation from other believers in a local church. We are a team. That's who we are.

- B. Our assignments are to be carried out in the context of the church. And it's not just so that our assignments can benefit others. You see, people who have put their roots down deeply into the local church draw support and nourishment when affliction comes. When circumstances conspire to drain the joy right out of you, there is no better place to be on earth than in the arms of a healthy church, where fellow believers who love you are there to support you and remind you who you really are.

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<sup>32</sup> BDAG, s.v. "σύν."

► We are bond-servants. We are saints. God is our Father. And we are a team. Knowing who we are turns our afflictions into assignments—assignments we carry out together, with joy.