

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DEACON?



*Devotions  
for Deacons*

# Partnership



Scripture Reading: *Philippians 1:1-11*

In Acts 16, Paul is on a journey visiting churches he has established, and firing people up for the gospel. He has probably mapped out a route already and set his course –until the Spirit of the Lord tells him differently, that is. Paul wants to go to Asia. The Spirit says no. Paul wants to go to Bithynia. The Spirit says no again.

And then Paul receives a vision, sending him to the outer reaches of where the Jews had scattered: a Roman colony with no temple, no place of worship or gathering. Yet Paul obeys.

Without a temple in which to preach, Paul goes down to the river to speak to the Gentile women there. This isn't necessarily a promising start, by the standards of the day. But, because he listens to the Spirit, Paul's conversation with the women by the river eventually leads to a church plant – the Philippian church, a church that becomes Paul's "partner in the gospel" (Phil. 1:5).

Partnerships are important for ministry. At its heart, ministry is relational. Paul understood this and depended on the blessings of partnership to help and encourage him.

**Partnerships are Spirit-given:** Before arriving in Philippi and establishing the church, Paul is redirected by the Spirit away from other places of ministry. He is given a vision that will lead him to Philippi. The Spirit guides Paul into this important partnership.

**Partnerships begin with commonality:** Partnerships work well when there is a fundamental understanding of what is shared. For Paul and the church in Philippi, they "share in God's grace" (vs. 7). It is a basic place to start. Sin is a great equalizer; everyone is equally in need of grace and each person is equally made in God's image.

**Partnerships focus on strengths:** In strong partnerships, each partner

has something important to contribute. Paul knows that the church in Philippi supports him through prayer (vs. 19), and will also "stand firm" (vs. 27) for the gospel. Paul realizes that his encouragement and teaching are also important to the church (vs. 24). Together, as partners, Paul and the church encourage and pray for each other and work from their strengths to advance the gospel together.

**Partnerships give joy:** Encouragement is critical to ministry and to partnership. Paul is writing the letter to the Philippians from prison, and, as he prays for the church in Philippi and is being prayed for, God gives him joy. Joy transcends experience and energizes mission.

Deacons, you need partners, like Paul, who will serve with you in your church and community. By the grace of God, however, you will form many partnerships as you live out God's call on your life.

Your partners may be members of your church who are equipped and called to serve with you. Your partners may also be your neighbours whom you serve and through whom you receive blessing. There are others: Diaconal Ministries Canada and other ministries, community agencies, and churches.

Seek out the Spirit's leading as you seek out partnerships. Pray! Allow God's Spirit to humble you and work through you. Open your heart as you partner and serve alongside those to whom the Spirit will lead you. Look for, and be blessed by each others' strengths. Never lose sight of the fact that we are all in need of grace: from the deacon sitting next to you to the members of your congregation, to your neighbour in need who might just bless you in surprising ways.

And, last of all, expect joy.