

Paul's Middle Letters – Philipppians

Ideas:

- Paul's concept of one mindedness, what I am now calling "one-minded focus"
- It's easily misunderstood—in the West and Global South.
- The importance of leaders with a one-minded focus is very rare in young aspiring leaders.
- 4 examples: Paul as senior leader, Timothy as an emerging young leader, Epaphroditus as a key coworker, all attempting to imitate Christ

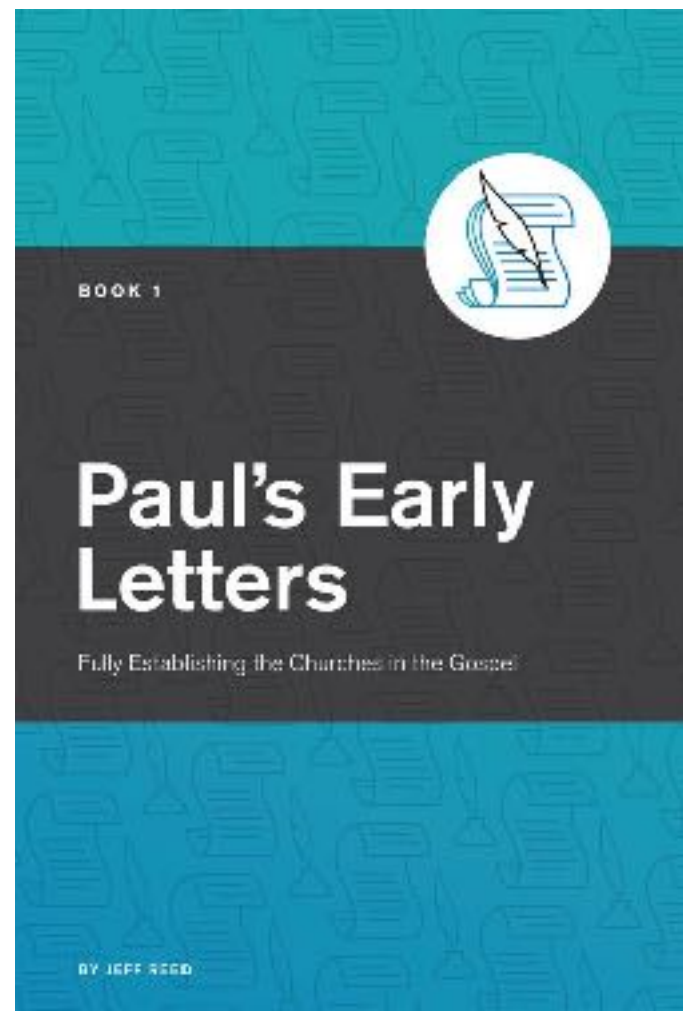
Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Issue: Participating with a One-Minded Focus

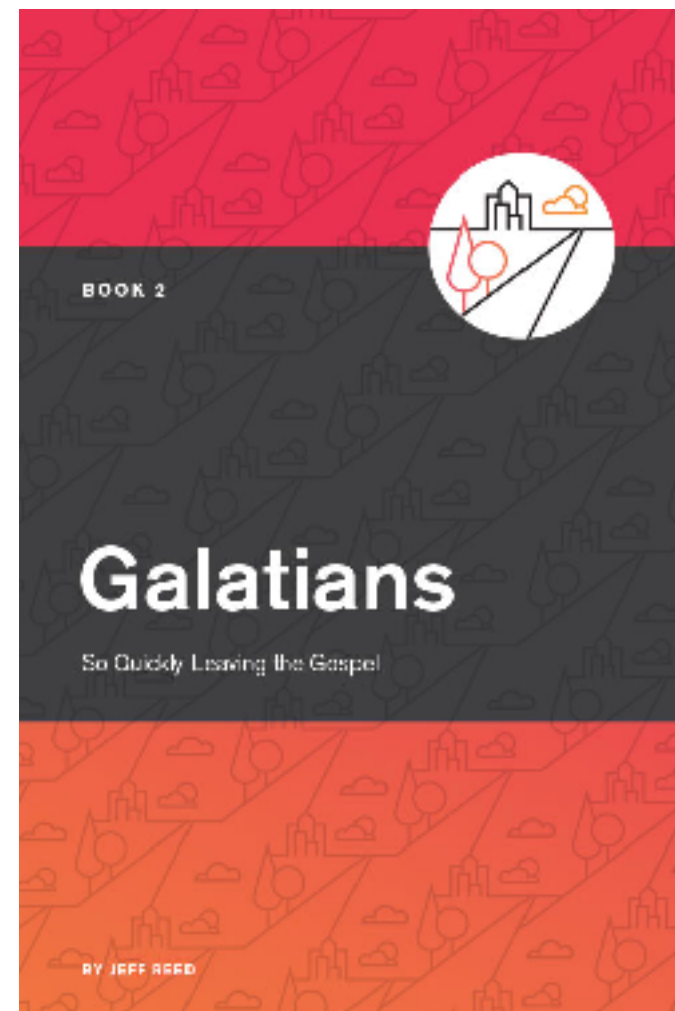
Questions:

1. Why was Paul so passionate about the Philippian churches understanding the concept of one mindedness? How does it relate to proper striving together for the progress of the gospel?
2. How does Paul's example of four leaders—Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus—illustrate what he means by a serious commitment to one mindedness? Why is it so key that leaders model this?
3. What does it take to establish and maintain one mindedness in our churches and amongst our leaders?
4. What is likely to happen in our churches and on our leadership teams if that one mindedness is fractured? What is likely to happen to the progress of the gospel?

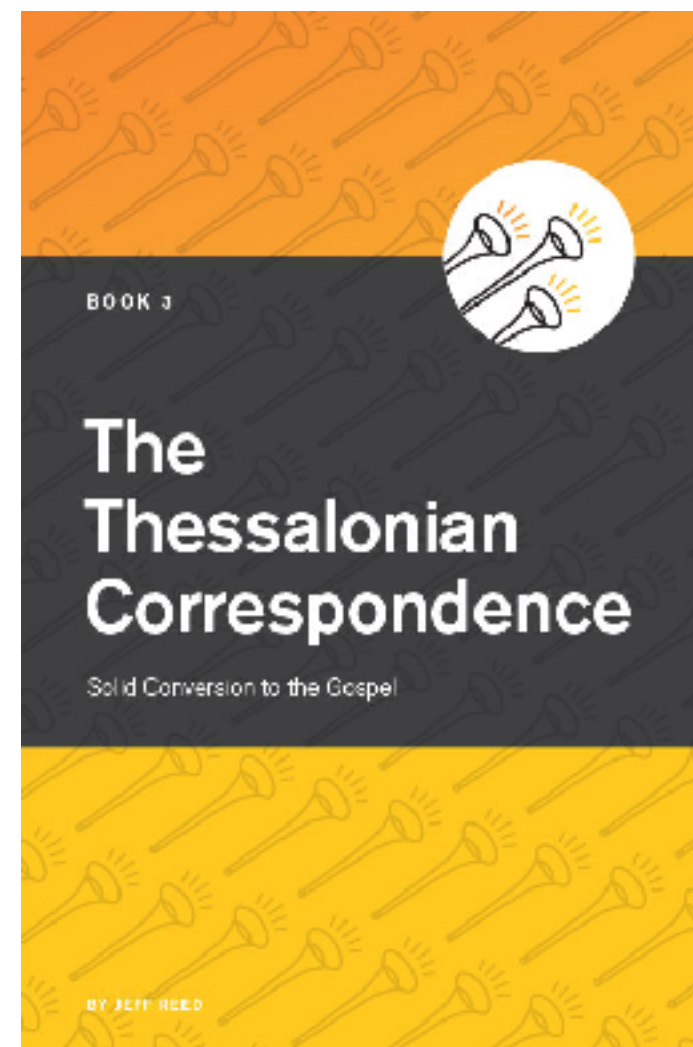
Paul's Early Letters



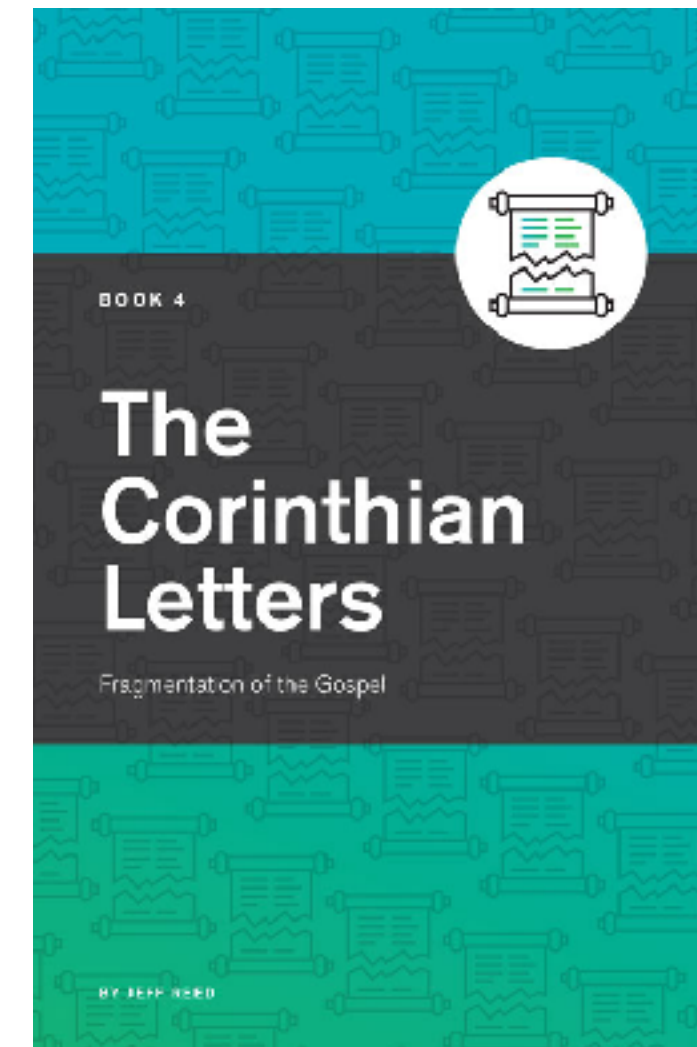
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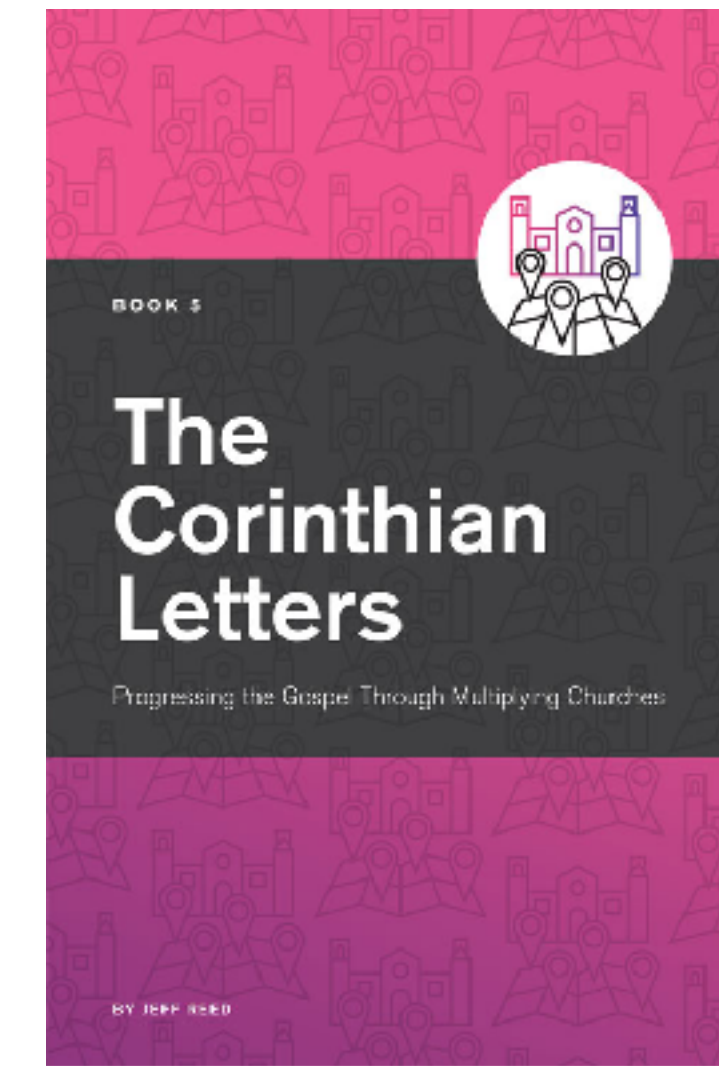
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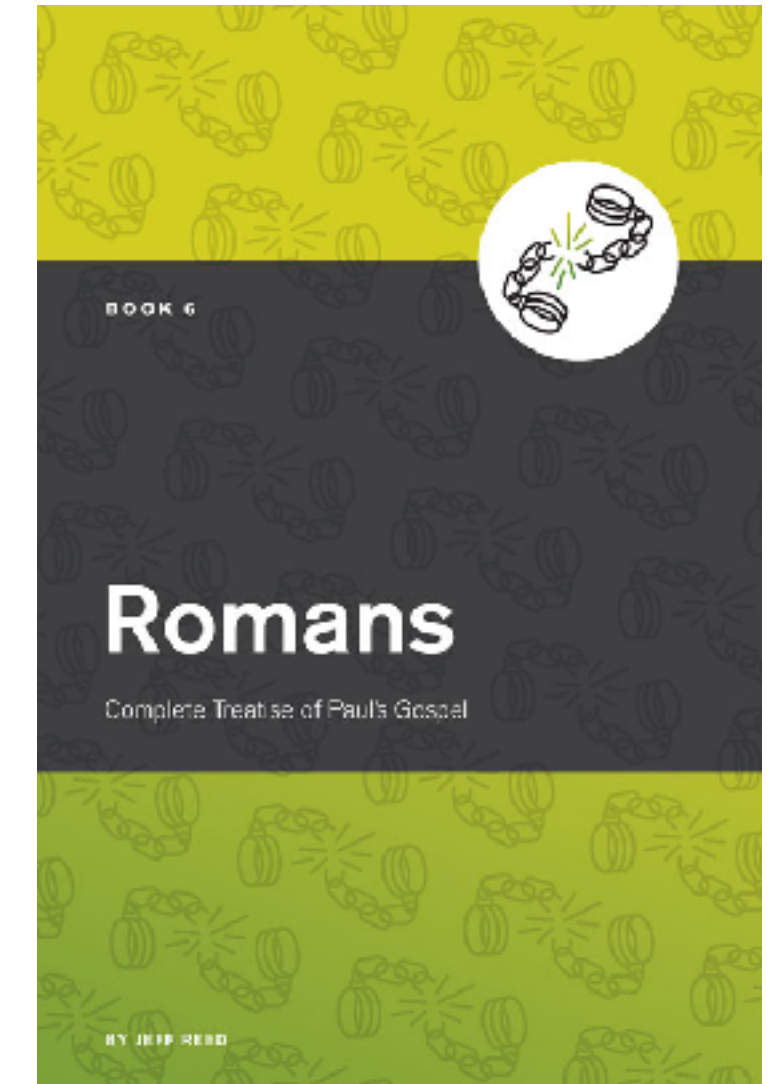
Winter/Sum. 51



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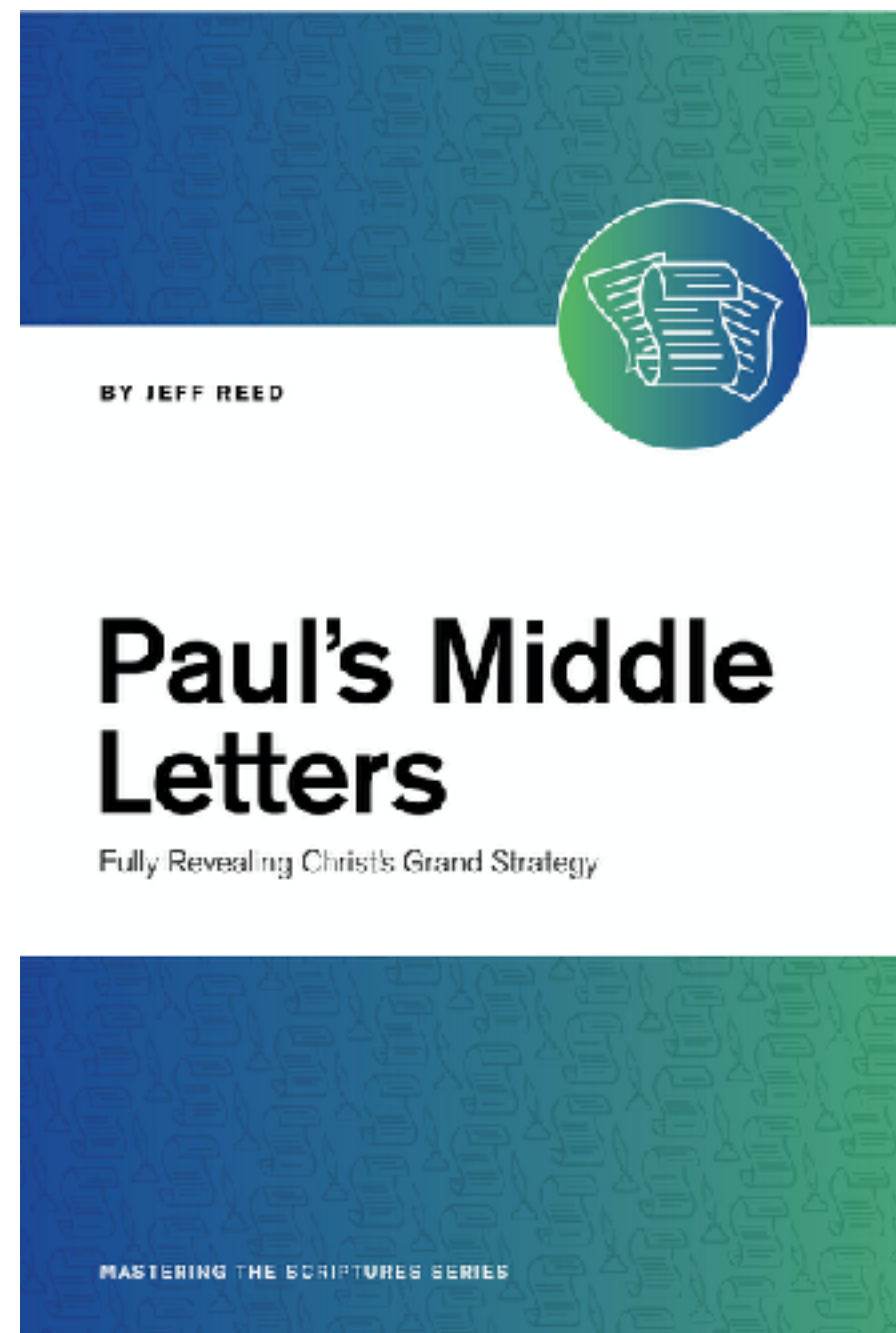
June 56



Nov. 56



Paul's Middle Letters



Feb. 60 to March 62



Autumn 60



Autumn 61



Spring 62



Paul's Middle Letters

New Testament Theology

It is critical that we treat these letters as a collection within Paul's larger collection.

These letters build on each other as they unfold. And while each stands alone as a letter to a particular set of churches, they all deal with similar issues that together present a very clear picture of establishing churches in Christ's grand strategy, including a full picture of the centrality of church networks in that strategy.

New Perspective on Paul

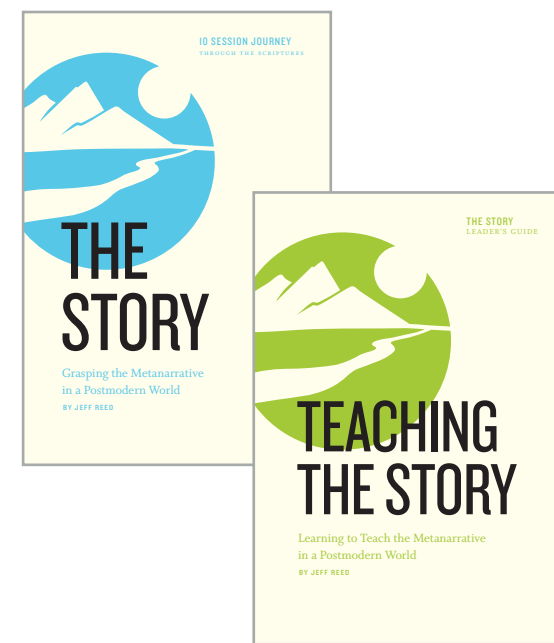
Old Perspective on Paul

Paul's letters contain miscellaneous, often unrelated topics that would be useful for future believers, especially in dealing with sin, salvation, and living the Christian life. These topics are a significant part of today's ever growing systematic theologies.

New Perspective on Paul

Paul's letters form a coherent, interlocking shape, foundational for churches in any generation to fully understand Christ's grand strategy of the Church being central to His unfolding kingdom and to living in full alignment of that grand strategy.

New Perspective on Paul



Kerygma
Early Acts
Apostles' Teaching
6 months
Paul: 3 years "night and day"



Didache
Body of Acts
Theology of Paul
1½ years

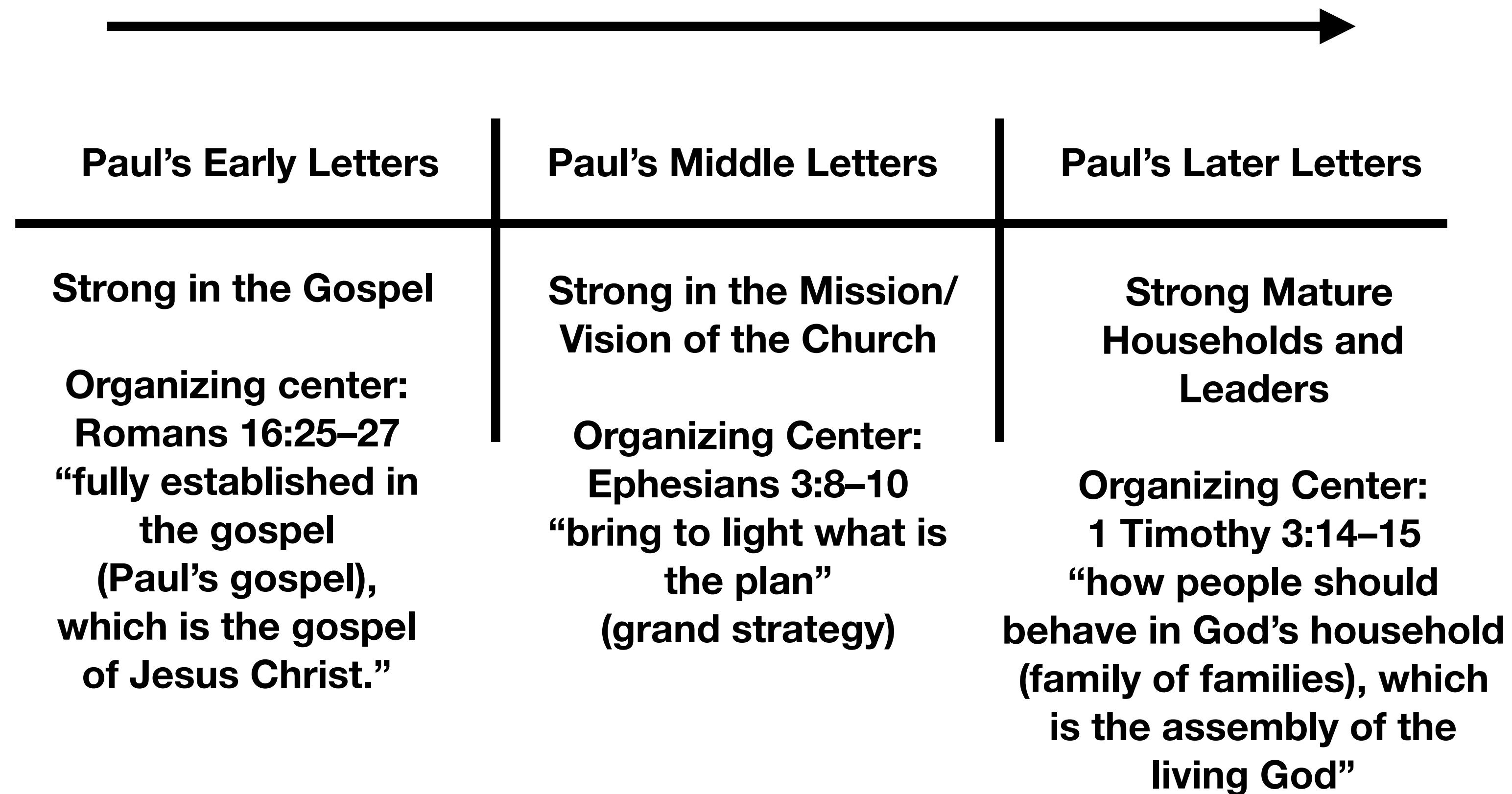


Full Kerygma
After Acts
Apostles' Gospels
1 year



Paul's Early, Middle, and Later Letters

The Process of Building Strong Churches



Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Ephesians – Hub Churches

Ephesians: A manifesto revealing Christ's "grand strategy" — the Church — to his key "hub churches" in Ephesus, with special attention to training the elders of this strategic city in the whole plan of Christ for an entire 3-year period.

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Colossians—Cluster Churches

Colossians: An almost identical letter to Ephesians (along with Philemon), written to the house churches scattered throughout the Lycus Valley (Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis) one year after writing his “manifesto” to the Ephesian churches to help them, at a very practical level, to implement the new church paradigm in their network of churches—a model as a framework for the entire history of clusters of churches down through the centuries.

Philemon: To practically illustrate to the network of churches in the Lycus Valley the importance of Christ's grand strategy of the kingdom through the church and to restructure all their social relationships—including slavery—around the church as a family of families, the household social structure of the church, which was evident in the Greek “republic” ideal of the day but fully realized in the emerging kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Philippi—A Strategic Partner Church

Philippi: a strategic network of churches in Philippi that participated with Paul from its inception. After Paul's full and mature presentation in his letter to the Ephesians of the centrality of the Church as the heart of Christ's grand strategy for bringing in the kingdom, Philippians illustrates the importance of churches participating with one mind in the progress of the gospel through His grand strategy—the Church.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

As you will see,

Ephesians—is mostly Christ's grand strategy and has a little on Paul's network.

Colossians–Philemon—is similar on Christ's grand strategy and has a lot on Paul's network.

Philippians—is mostly on participating in Christ's grand strategy through Paul's network.

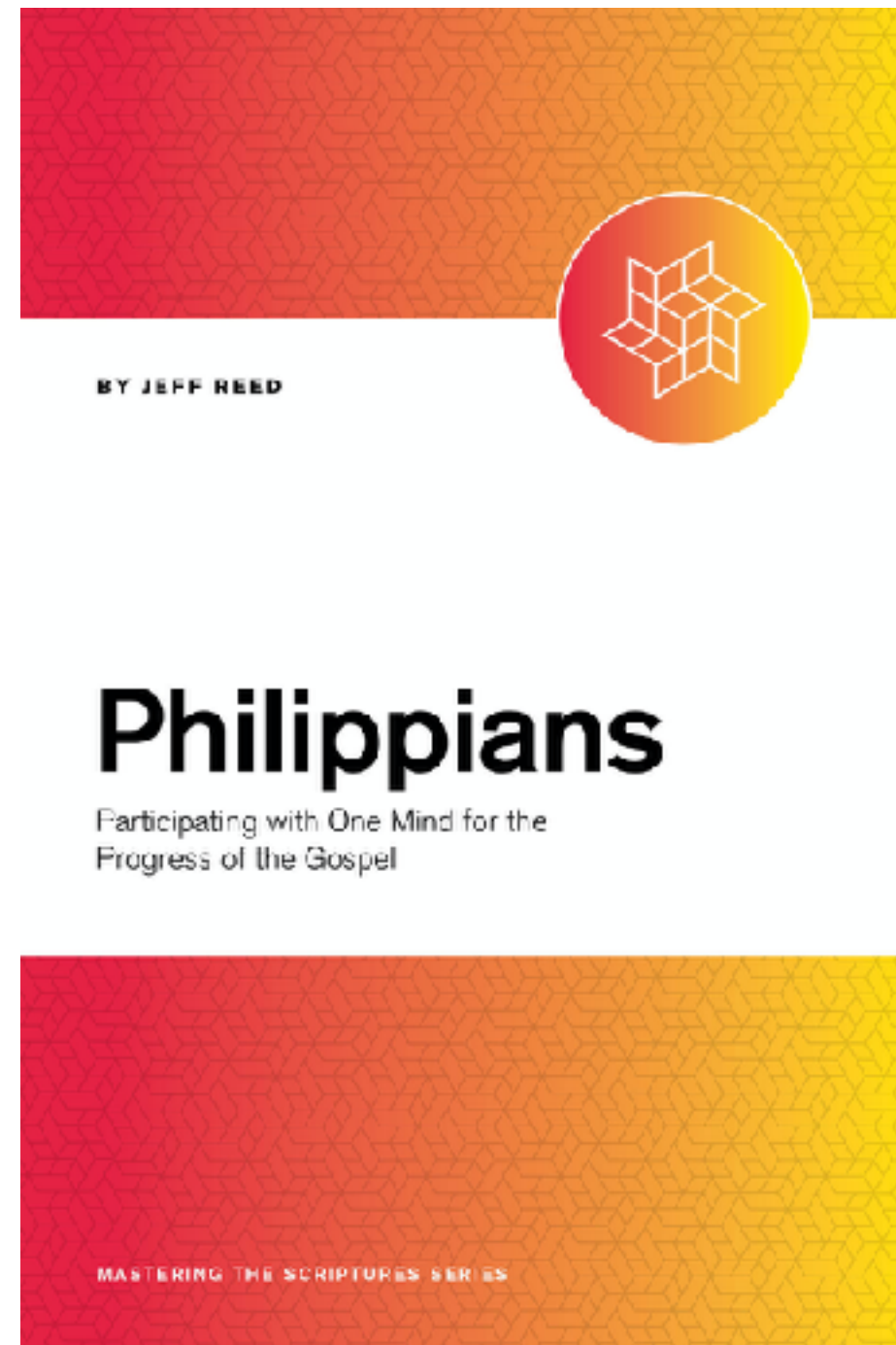
All 4 letters use similar terminology and sort of work as one growing theology of Christ's vision and mission for His churches.



Paul's Middle Letters

Fully Revealing Christ's Grand Strategy

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians



Session 1: Fully Participating with Paul in the Progress of the Gospel

Session 2: Participating with a One-Minded Focus

Session 3: Participating in the Power of the Resurrection

Session 4: Participating with Our Financial Resources

Session 5: Participating with Paul's Complex Apostolic Network

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians

Let's go back to our outline. What does it mean for this strategic church to fully participate with him? As you will see as this letter unfolds, that participation was to be a huge focus of the Philippian churches.

Fully Participating with Paul in the Progress of the Gospel 1:1–26

In these first verses, Paul lays the foundation for challenging them to more fully participate with him in the progress of the gospel. After praising them for their unique, focused participation with him, he reflects on his imprisonment as being key to that progress as he defends and proclaims the gospel.

He is very frank about his role and the importance of his imprisonment.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Participating with a One-Minded Focus 1:27–2:30

In this section of the letter, Paul challenges them to strive together with a focused, one minded, total commitment, participating with him in the progress of the gospel. He gives four examples of a focused, self-sacrificing, total commitment: Christ, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Participating in the Power of the Resurrection 3:1–4:9

Then he turns to that commitment being a life focus, a goal, as citizens of heaven, to “attain to the full power of the resurrection.” He builds on the power he wants for the Ephesian church, while acknowledging he himself has not fully attained it, a focus he models for them by everything in his life.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Participating with Our Financial Resources 4:10–20

He then turns to an aspect of their financial gifts to him, showing how his total commitment shapes how he thinks about his own resources, providing a framework for their continued total commitment of their resources as well, which he has commented on throughout the letter up to this point.

Participating with Paul's Complex Apostolic Network 4:21–23

In this final section, though only a short 3 verses, he ties them into the network he has unfolded in the first 3 books. And assuming that teaching, in this letter, he expands it enormously by completely focusing on the network participating with him in the progress of the gospel, tying it all together.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

As we turn to this section, we need to realize that Paul is concerned that the Philippians develop a one-minded focus on their participation with Paul in the progress of the gospel.

It is the heart of this section: a one-minded focus.

His concern that they develop a one-minded focus permeates the letter, and he will come back to it again in chapter 3 and chapter 4

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

¹⁵ Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold fast to what we have attained (*standard*). ¹⁷ Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example (*pattern*) you have in us. 3:15–17 NRSV

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4:2–3 NRSV

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Participating with a One-Minded Focus 1:27–2:30

In this section of the letter, Paul challenges them to strive together with a focused, one minded, total commitment, participating with him in the progress of the gospel. He gives four examples of a focused, self-sacrificing, total commitment: Christ, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

First, we will tie the concept to the progress of the gospel, which is key to participating effectively with Paul. 1:27–30

Second, we will look at one-minded focus as equivalent to having the mind of Christ. 2:1–11

Third, we will look at four examples of one-minded focus: Paul (1:12–18), Titus (2:19–24), Epaphroditus (2:25–30); and Christ; all are based on Paul's extensive picture of Christ's one-minded focus, which they are imitating.

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

Now let's develop a key understanding of this concept of “one-minded focus”

²⁷ Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. ²⁹ For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well — ³⁰ since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Philippians 1:27–30

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

First, we will tie the concept to the progress of the gospel, which is key to participating effectively with Paul 1:27–30

Paul's concept of “one-minded focus”

2 key words and a phrase emerge: one spirit and one mind

“one spirit”: one disposition, one attitude, one way of thinking (LN)

“one mind”: to think in a particular manner, to hold a view, to have an attitude (LN)

phroneo—to think, set one's mind on; to think in a particular manner, to have an attitude; an opinion, frame of mind, mindset, to hold a view (LN)

“faith of the gospel”: to believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance—to believe in, to have confidence in, to have faith in, to trust, faith, trust (LN)

Their striving together with Paul demands a one-minded complete trust in the gospel (assumes Paul's earlier letters).

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians

Paul's concept of "one-minded focus"

1. *Striving together with a one-minded focus* was based on their absolute confidence in the gospel. (Paul's Early Letters).
2. Paul assumes that they follow the struggle they saw in Paul and now hear he still has: a struggle for the progress of the gospel that often demands sacrificing everything.
3. This demands a one-minded struggle together, in which they all carry the same way of thinking, the same attitude, the same perspective (i.e. the new perspective of Paul).

Now we turn to Paul's development of this one-minded focus on Christ, which they all are to possess.

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

2:1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
Philippians 2:1–4

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Paul's concept of "one-minded focus" is developed from Christ himself; Paul calls it "the mind of Christ." He uses four terms to describe and expand this "one-minded focus":

- "be of the same mind": phroneo—to think, set one's mind on; to think in a particular manner; an opinion, frame of mind, mindset, to hold a view; to have an attitude (LN)
- "having the same love": being "in" sphere of love, true to your being
- "being in full accord": of one mind, unity, of full accord (sympsychoi)—psyche in symphony
- "be of one mind": think the thoughts of, hold a view

Paul chooses a whole set of words that basically say one mindedness involves the integration of your whole being: your thinking, your views toward life, way of thinking, frame of mind, personal perspectives. They should have this kind of one mindedness within their churches.

How can this be? How can it be achieved? What about personal life choices? preferences?
What exactly does Paul mean?

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Look at how he explains this within the concept of “the mind of Christ.”

The same word is used for the third time—phroneo, which means to think, set one's mind on; to think in a particular manner, to have an attitude (LN), an opinion, frame of mind, mindset, to hold a view.

This is where confusion comes in. We are all unique: personalities, passions, varieties of gifts, abilities, and on and on.

So what does it mean to be of the same mind? It means to adopt the mind of Christ. What does that mean? What does it mean in these letters so far? *The mind of Christ* means you build your way of thinking, your mind set, your view of life around

- Christ's grand strategy (in the context of the story)
- Christ's philosophy of life
- Christ's first principles

This is what Anton was trying to explain to me regarding his Ukraine experiences.

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians

How is it maintained? How deep does it go? How do we know we are actually operating with the mind of Christ?

Phase one: Program our thinking around Christ's grand strategy in the context of the story; develop His philosophy of life and operate based on His first principles in all of our thinking, life decisions, etc.

Phase two: Develop a one-minded focus: not grumbling, putting aside personal ambition, genuinely seeking the personal interests of others first, having the same love of others that Christ had, even over your own interests.

That's what we see in the three examples that follow the example of Christ.

But let's look more deeply at Christ's example.

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
in death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father

Philippians 2:6–11

Paul's Middle Letters — Philippians

This short little excursus is quite unique. First note that it is a hymn. Why did Paul choose this form? How does it lay foundations for the three examples that follow?

Maybe this hymn was sung amongst the churches, and Paul shaped it theologically; or maybe he just chose to put his thoughts in a hymn, with the view that the heart of what he was challenging the Philippians churches in, would be sung by the churches.

(Remember in Ephesians and Colossians he challenges the churches to speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.)

Again, what a coherent thinker!

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians

The essence of Christ's "one-minded focus":

Before giving his three examples of leaders — himself, Timothy and Epaphroditus — Paul lays a careful example they are all imitating. While it is not a carefully argued theological discourse, it gives significant insight into the person and work of Christ.

1. Christ's example begins with Him developing His grand strategy within the story, placing Himself under and within God's overall plan for the coming kingdom.
2. He remained completely focused on the mission above His own interests by coming to earth as a slave and staying focused on the mission, even to His death.
3. Jesus' humble example of submitting to God's overall plan, even to the point of completely giving up His own interests, resulted in inaugurating the global progress of the gospel that will, eventually, completely bring in the whole kingdom. In following the examples, we can follow Him and be part of the story as the kingdom is inaugurating.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Now let's look at Paul's 3 examples in light of Christ's example, which Paul alludes to in each one.

Paul: 2:12–18

Timothy: 2:19–24

Epaphroditus: 2:25–30

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Example of Paul

¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

¹⁴ Do all things without murmuring and arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. ¹⁶ It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you—
¹⁸ and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.

Philippians 2:12–18

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians

Essence of Paul's Example

Like everything else Paul writes, he is building his central call to a “one-minded focus” by weaving in and out and around his argument, ever expanding all elements of the concept in a totally integrated way.

1. Part of Paul's “one-minded focus” is being willing to sacrifice his very life in the progress of the gospel, as evidenced in his current situation of imprisonment.
2. Part of Paul's “one-minded focus” is continued frank speech, knowing that he can not let up for a minute in challenging the Philippian churches to not be grumbling or complaining, to be willing to suffer, and to realize that God is at work in them so they need to be careful, almost fearful of not carrying out their work.
3. Part of Paul's relentless activity is to keep them striving together for the progress of the gospel and responding properly to his authority while demanding a total “one-minded focus” from them.

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

Example of Timothy

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon.

Philippians 2:19–24

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Essence of Timothy's Example

Timothy is an example and the most significant young emerging leader on Paul's team. Again, while accomplishing several things at one time in this paragraph, Paul is careful to tie it to Jesus' example of not seeking His own interests and reinforcing Paul's challenge to them.

1. Timothy stands out as a specific example, being one of the rare young leaders not seeking his own interests but truly seeking the interests of Paul and his churches.
2. It is a strong tendency of young leaders to seek their own interests, constantly seeking recognition and complaining if not used the way they think they should be. (There are 3–4 examples in our churches now. I will spare them the Euodia–Syntache experience.)
3. A good test of whether young leaders are genuinely seeking the interests of churches they are serving is whether they genuinely serve senior leaders, especially their Pauls, like a son serving his father and can maintain that over the long haul (Timothy was 20 years under Paul.)

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

Example of Epaphroditus

²⁵ Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus—my brother and co-worker and fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶ for he has been longing for all of you, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, ³⁰ because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.

Philippians 2:25–30

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

Essence of Epaphroditus' Example

Now Paul turns to a faithful co-worker, who was sent to him from the Philippian churches. Again reasoning from the real situations of his churches, Paul fills out his emerging concept of leaders and churches developing a one-minded focus by genuinely seeking others' interests, and reviews how this shapes his concerns.

1. One sign of Epaphroditus' seeking the interests of others rather than his own, is seen in his distress that he is causing concern in the churches because of his serious illness, rather than his own concerns of having a very serious illness.
2. Again, Paul taps into Epaphroditus' illness as an example of how our "one-minded" focus can bring us even to the point of death, modeled by Paul and ultimately Christ.
3. Paul calls on them to honor such leaders who because of their service risk everything. Again as a way of illustrating the importance of not seeking their own interests, he exhorts them at the beginning of these examples.

Paul's Middle Letters — Philipppians

Let's try to pull it all together.

Paul's concept of a "one-minded focus" (needs more work, woefully inadequate)

1. It begins by understanding that "one-minded focus" begins with Christ and His willingness to put others' interests even above His own life.
2. It assumes that developing the mind of Christ includes fully grasping His grand strategy in the context of the story, His philosophy, and first principles.
3. It does not mean we have the same passions, interests, and gifts as everyone else, but that we all operate out of the same mind of Christ, at the center of which as church leaders and church networks we are with one-mind focused on the participation in the progress of the gospel, in the global unfolding of Christ's grand strategy. (SIMA)
4. We must be alert to grumbling and complaining, a sign of failing to focus on others interests first, which will lead to damaging our "one-minded focus" on the progress of the gospel, causing us to not engage in fully completing our work.

Paul's Middle Letters—Philippians

Leaders are key to shaping the “one-minded focus” of churches. That focus must permeate apostolic teams—from senior leaders, to emerging young leaders, to co-workers.

We must relentlessly be challenging full participation of both our churches and emerging leaders and co-workers. It is what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians as the “daily pressure of the churches.”

We must realize that, as churches, we need that constant challenge to be strong, to continue to strive more and more to accomplish the work we have been given to do with fear and trembling, that we may accomplish all that God has for us.

We must realize as individual believers we must put aside our personal interests and avoid grumbling and complaining at all costs, so we don't affect the collective effort of fully participating in the progress of the gospel.

Paul's Middle Letters – Philipppians

A hermeneutical journey

- My experience: Jensen's "key center" charts on every book of the Bible; key passages. My chart: Humility—humility, modeled by Christ, then Paul, then Timothy, then Epahproditus. Jensen's method, first step out of inductive Bible study, but still could not see clearly.
- Kaiser and *Validity in Interpretation*: "author's intention statements and genre logic"
- Now full understanding, "New Perspective on Paul" — coherent theology in churches and in culture; NT Wright "Historical Paul and Systematic Theology: To Start a Conversation" ch. 7 in *Interpreting Paul*.

Point: You cannot see clearly and accurately with a bad hermeneutic: Inductive Bible Study. I was lucky. All I had to do was change the idea of "a key center" to author's intended meaning and I had all the work of the book, charts, and key centers of key passages.

Almost all study booklets and women's Bible study systems' inductive Bible studies cannot see what you just saw this morning.

Paul's Middle Letters – Philippians

Issue: Participating with a One-Minded Focus Today

Questions:

1. Why is it so easy to misunderstand this one-minded focus in Western churches? in churches in the Global South?
2. Why is it so important to grasp this concept in our effort to fully participate in the progress of the gospel?
3. Why is it critical for leaders to model this concept for the churches?
4. What will happen to our churches if we are not one minded? How difficult is it to maintain one mindedness in our churches over the long haul?