

# 52 Days with the Philippians

## Greg Strickland

### Preface

This devotional was the product of studying the epistle of Paul to the congregation at Philippi. While I was preparing a five-part series of sermons for revival meetings that I was preaching throughout 2023, I did my best to give the hearers an overview of what God would want them to know and do from the letter. However, one cannot talk about everything from the book of Philippians that he wants to or maybe even should in a few short hours over four days. Hence, this devotional book.

I hope you will be uplifted, inspired, challenged, and changed by spending fifty-two days with the Philippians.

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### Philippians 1:1-2

*"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints 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."*

Of all the characteristics of the heavenly Kingdom citizen, perhaps servanthood is most difficult to obtain. It is not that there is a shortage of opportunities to serve others; it is that servanthood demands death.

Being a servant demands the death of an agenda. The servant cannot concern himself with the goals of his life nor the desires of his heart. The servant is at the mercy of the master. The master will provide for the servant's needs as the master sees fit, and the accomplishments for which the servant strives will suit the master. The death of agenda really means the death of a man - the death of self. This, most people find utterly distasteful.

Yet in the economy of the Kingdom of God, servanthood is the highest level. The Apostle Paul and his protege, Evangelist Timothy, begin the letter to the Philippian congregation with this very reminder. Here they mention four different groups of people in the Church. All of them are servants.

He reminds them that he and Timothy are *doulos*. That is, "servants" who are "bought-and-paid-for" slaves. The Apostle - seen usually by us as the apex leader of the Kingdom of God on earth -

uses the most obvious and base word. Paul and Timothy know their lives are not their own - but they have been bought and paid for by the blood of Christ Jesus.

Paul and Timothy write to the "saints". Maybe the most obscure of the words here in relation to servanthood, it truly is indicative of the position of a member of the Church - the body of Christ. Those who are saints are not "special" because of their own selves, but special because of their sanctified lives. They are called to live lives that are marked for a unique purpose - the purpose of doing the will of their Master Christ Jesus.

We are also told that the letter should be heard by the overseers and deacons. Overseers are the men chosen by the Evangelist at Philippi to be the shepherds of the saints there. Shepherds are men who certainly do not live for themselves; they are at the mercy of the flock's needs. The word deacon is a transliteration of a word that literally means "minister" or "servant". Both kinds of selected leaders of a congregation are servant leaders. As such, they must lead in service!

What more could we expect in the Church when our Lord and Savior washed the feet of His disciples? While they all pretended not to notice that no one took up the basin and the towel - traditionally the role of a household servant - to wash the feet of the Last Supper's attendees, Jesus showed them what He expected of those who would follow after Him.

"But whoever would be great among you must be your servant." (Matthew 20:26b)

If you claim to follow Jesus, you are dead and buried! At your immersion in water, you were baptized into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is not you who live - but Christ Who should be living in you! (Galatians 2:20-21) Furthermore, Jesus said that we will have to die every day if we would follow Him. (Luke 9:23)

Christian, who are you living for today? Whose agenda is it that you seek to serve tomorrow? Is your life characterized by serving others? There is no other path to follow in the Kingdom of God!

### **Philippians 1:3-5**

*"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."*

Are you the kind of Christian for which your preacher could be thankful? There are certainly a lot of reasons that a minister of the gospel could be thankful for someone else in the congregation. And, there are certainly some leaders that don't know what to be thankful for! However, Paul says he's thankful for the Philippians and gives a specific reason why: They have been partners in the gospel - tenacious partners in the gospel!

It's easy for us to come to the Church of Jesus for the benefits of the family. A Church congregation should be a place where we are lovingly enveloped with understanding as family. Our brothers and sisters in Christ can, and often do, become people with which we have a

stronger family bond than that of our own physical families. Contrary to the old saying, water (of baptism) is (can/should be?) thicker than blood. The family constituted by the blood of Jesus is greater than that of physical DNA.

However, to partner in the gospel is (as some of us like to say) "a whole 'nuther thing entirely"! Partnering in the gospel means that we are not just "here" to take - but to give. We are part of the body as a healthy, working member - not just a wart or parasite. We are actively injecting our spiritual gift(s) to promote the good news of Jesus Christ through the Church to the world.

But it wasn't just that participation that made Paul thankful for the Philippians, but he also praised them, and thanked God for, their tenacity! Paul said, "Y'all have been there since day one - all the way 'til now!"

It couldn't have been easy to carry on the ministry when the guy who started your congregation was arrested! Wouldn't that be scandalous? Regardless of the truth or reason, that's a lot of "bad press". "Do we want to be associated with that?"

It couldn't have been easy to carry on the ministry of the gospel when family and friends with which you had participated in the idolatry of Caesar worship had questions or concerns. It must have been difficult to proclaim yourself a citizen of God's Kingdom in a city so proud to be Roman and be known as "Little Rome".

We too live in a community where it is becoming increasingly unpopular to follow Jesus. We live where truthful, Bible-teaching leaders are in short supply. We are now part of a country where third-world countries, once the the recipients of Christian missionaries, now send missionaries to evangelize us!

Could Paul, or your congregation's leader(s), be thankful for your participation in the gospel? Or have you given up long since "day one"? Where you ever involved in the gospel beyond what it did for you?

Take a hard look at your participation in the gospel - not just your "church attendance". Don't give up partnering with us in the gospel!

### **Philippians 1:6**

*"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."*

Maybe you were taught as a child, "Go on...finish what you started!" That admonition is one building block of good character. Working until completion, "stick-to-it-ivness" - even tenaciousness - is a great quality. It is also very godly. When God starts something, as far as it depends on Him... as much as we will allow Him..., He will finish it.

God took six days. Over that time, He worked wonders - from absolutely nothing! On the seventh day, He sat back, having judged each individual part of His masterpiece as "good", and saw that, as a whole, His creation was very good. (Genesis 1)

In Zechariah 4:6-10, God assures His post-exile governor over Jerusalem, Zerubbabel, that just as God had enabled him by divine power to lay the foundation of the new temple, God would also help him complete it. Neither would this happen because of the strength or power of Zerubbabel, but by God's Spirit.

Similarly, God will not abandon the building of His latest temple in the souls of each individual who belongs to Jesus. When we were immersed into Christ, the Holy Spirit entered in and began building. With our permission and submission to Him in repentance, He began the work of clearing His new House of Prayer of its distractions, contradictions, and pollutions.

This is not, for anyone, an instant - or even overnight - work. Instead, God patiently works His wonders as He brings to life the once dead-in-sin spirit of a soul. Like a wild horse, God works to break us. He doesn't work like an old-time cowboy we see in the movies - hopping on and attempting to force us into being his servant. But He speaks to us as a horse "whisperer" that slowly and gently moves closer day-by-day. He bids us come and then offers us - ever so quietly - sustenance, grace, and... time.

Sometimes, we want the process to move more quickly. Sometimes, we wonder if God hasn't stopped and given up on us. But Paul forwards God promise to us again. God finishes what He starts. If we will but avail ourselves to Him, His Word, and His body as He calls us to daily, He promises that when He returns for us, we will be ready!

Don't give up on God. Trust me... He hasn't given up on you.

### **Philippians 1:7-8**

*"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."*

Do you ever feel unworthy? You may receive a wonderful gift from someone - and yet feel unworthy. You may receive a promotion with a raise in salary at your job - and yet feel unworthy. You may find "the love of your life" - and yet feel unworthy. That feeling may or may not be appropriate, but how we deal with it can make a lot of difference in our approach to life.

Some will see the circumstance as a blessing, humbly move forward, and make the most of it. Others will reject the gift, quit the job, or bow out of the love affair. Pride, fear, or feelings of inadequacy may limit the happiness and fulfillment that they seek in life.

As the Apostle Paul writes to the Philippians about his love and thankfulness for them, some might say, "Us, Paul?" But he defends his affection for them. He feels this way because they all,

Apostle and "pew-sitter" alike, are receivers of grace. That "grace" he speaks of is just that - a gift to the unworthy.

Besides the graces (unmerited gifts) of forgiveness, justification, sanctification, and the like - he says they have also shared in grace, both in his imprisonment and in the work of the gospel. Somehow, these circumstances of life to which God has led them have worked to bring more gifts - some of them obvious (1:18), others not so (1:29).

The point is this: No matter our "station" in God's Church - the body of Christ - we are all members that play a part. None of us are worthy. All of us are just blessed to be included. Don't run from the Christian life in unworthiness. Don't let feelings of inadequacy, pride, or fear lock you out from the blessings of following Jesus.

It is OK to receive the gift! It's the only way that any of us are getting out of this world alive!

### **Philippians 1:9-11**

*"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."*

Prolific song writers Hal David and Burt Bacharach penned the song "What the World Needs Now Is Love" in 1965. Certainly, the world could do with a lot more love. If everyone loved more... wow.

Paul has been telling the Philippians how deeply he cares for them, and that he has continued to endeavor in prayer for them. He's told them that it is right that he do this. And what is it that he is praying for? He prays that their "love may abound more and more". They are a congregation that has shown their love for others; He prays that their love will continually grow in them and out of them in a covering of others.

But pay close attention to the next phrase! While Paul prays that they would have an enduring love - a love that is strong - what one might call a dutiful love, he prays it would be paired with knowledge and discernment. Love is not love - no matter how unconditional - when it loves blindly.

Our world today says that love is being "OK with" or even encouraging every thought or lifestyle that someone might hold. "You do you" is the mantra of our time. But that is not love. For love to be love - for that commitment toward a neighbor, family member, or friend to hold any value - knowledge and discernment have to be a part of the recipe.

An attempt at love without knowledge of truth can push a person further toward destruction. Even a well-meaning commitment of dutiful affection could hurt a person when we don't discern when and how it should be manifested toward another. Without knowledge and discernment, our commitment to another may give approval to something less than the best - less than what is

"excellent" - in another's life. And it is that excellence that God wants for us. He doesn't necessarily desire comfort for our lives all the time; He desires that we experience life in a way that prepares us for Jesus' return with righteous lives.

Sometimes a genuine affection and feeling of obligation for someone creates a blind spot. We "love" in a way that's destructive. God wants us to love! But pray with me today that He will help us love with knowledge and discernment.

### **Philippians 1:12**

*"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,"*

In one of the most famous episodes of Seinfeld, the Costanza's home is full of guests for Frank's made-up holiday, Festivus. One of the features of this yearly holiday, besides the Festivus Pole and the Feats of Strength, is the Airing of Grievances. At the appropriate time, Frank stood up at the table and said, "Now - for the Airing of Grievances! I've got a lotta problems with you people and now you're gonna hear about it!"

That could sure be my approach to life - particularly in difficult circumstances. I've definitely got something to say, and I'm ready to say it. Is that you?

Yet, the Apostle Paul had a "Kingdom Mentality". I doubt he really "enjoyed" his time in prison, but first on his mind to tell the Philippians about it all was the effect it was having on the Kingdom. He didn't say, "First, I gotta tell you - the food here is rotten!" He didn't say, "You wait 'til I get out and deal with...." What is the first thing he wants them to know? "You know, you may find this hard to believe, but all this has really served to advance the gospel!" He will begin detailing how later, but this is the subject he wants to address first and foremost.

What about us? What has happened to us recently that is "less than desirable" - maybe to say the least about it? Are our lives so intertwined with the propagation of the gospel that there is a link? Are our trials and triumphs wasted with an earthly perspective, or are they advancing the gospel? If they are, are we Kingdom-minded enough to see it?

What's the most fantastic thing about God's Kingdom that you've just got to express today?

### **Philippians 1:13-14**

*"so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord, by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear."*

Certain things always make their way "to the top": the cream, a splinter, etc. For some reason, in God's creation, certain things will not mix or stay hidden. According to this "law", the truth will out. "The truth will out" is just an idiomatic way of saying, "The truth will always become

known." You can hide it with lies. You can bury it in denial. You can accept assumption. But eventually - somewhere, at some point - the truth will out.

Had Paul reacted as we mentioned last week that he could have (and we might be tempted to act), people might have come to a different conclusion about him. ("See, he is a 'trouble-maker'.") But everything that Paul did and said showed concern, not for himself, but for the Kingdom. Yes, he was intent on having his case for false arrest and punishment heard before the Caesar himself, but his priority was a free missionary trip to Rome and the opportunity to preach the gospel before the highest court in the empire.

That does not mean that Paul ever lacked boldness. In Acts 23, as he speaks to the Jewish Council and the Roman Tribunal, the high priest had him struck on the mouth for what he perceived was blasphemous. To this, Paul said,

"God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?"

When it was pointed out that this man he "reviled" was the High Priest, he was apologetic. (Though, I have to wonder if his "I did not know...that he was the high priest..." was a little sarcastic. Paul knew Jesus was the real High Priest, and he had already pointed out that he wasn't acting very "high-priestly"!)

My point, even in this instance: - truth... front and center!

As the guard there in Rome is a captive audience to his daily prayers, praises, and homiletic ramblings - they become aware; Paul's not here because of some violation of civil law. Whether they understand or believe what they hear, they know Paul is there because of this "Christ" and some sort of religious dispute - something about which they couldn't care less.

Because of the truth's appearance, the other disciples who heard his story became bolder. "Look what Paul is enduring! We've had enough! We will be bold too!" And without fear they speak more truth.

But that begs the question: Does that even matter to you? What is the purpose of your life, friend? That is really the question you must ask. In the end, in the final analysis, what matters most?

It wasn't that Paul didn't have a "whole 'nuther" life. It wasn't that these emboldened disciples had no other family concerns, health matters to attend to, or careers and jobs to carry-on. It was that they knew the chief and foremost thing in their life was the truth of the gospel of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Take-aways:

One, decide if the Kingdom matters foremost to you. If not, re-think your discipleship in Christ. If so -

Two, respond to adversity in that way - like only the Kingdom matters. Jesus said, "...seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Allow the Truth to out!

### **Philippians 1:15-16**

*"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel."*

From last week, you might wonder, "How is it that Paul could see past his trials? How was it that, above all, he sought the Kingdom - while in prison!?" Well, before we get on to how and why other people do things, note that Paul, besides having a Kingdom motivation, sees the purpose in this trial he's enduring. Paul, and all the other genuine believers, understand he is where he is "for the defense of the gospel".

What is going on in his life is proving the good news is real in a practical sense. If Paul really believes what he's been preaching, it's time to "put his money where his mouth is". His continual belief, lived out in hope and consistent preaching and praise in prison, show the Truth of Jesus Christ truly is good news! It bears up to the toughest circumstances.

Second, this good news will be defended at some point, he and others believe, before the Roman Caesar. His pain will give him the ultimate pulpit. Some may insincerely search for popularity and try to replace him and gain his supposed status - but Paul is moving into the biggest pulpit anyone has ever had since the cross itself.

What about your life?

Are your trials wasted in bitterness and wrath? Or are your tribulations a pulpit of both practicality and prose? Do people see the gospel as more true - more real - because of your response to heartache? Or do they assume all you've said is just for show? Remember again, "truth will out". The truth about the Truth - and how or even if It effects you - will be seen and remembered!

### **Philippians 1:17-18**

*"The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice."*

What then? What a question! It's a question that maybe we should ask more often. It's actually a question that Jesus Himself asked once.

When Jesus has a "walk-with-me" talk with Peter in John 21, Jesus lays some pretty heavy stuff on him concerning his future. Peter looked around and saw John following. (Was John

eavesdropping!?) Peter says, "What about him?" That's when Jesus does it. He gives him a "What then?".

Jesus says, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" (21:22)

While Paul is excited about how emboldened people are by his imprisonment - while he looks with eager anticipation toward a possible audience with Caesar... he remembers. He remembers the shysters. The guys that are out there, not preaching about the Christ because they are sincere in their faith and purpose, but because it's an opportunity for... popularity? ...fortune? With Paul out of the way - with no one to challenge their false teachings - without the opportunity to hear one of the men who was "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6), they could assume the spotlight. That kind of thing turns the stomachs of anyone who has a conscience.

But what is Paul's response? "What then?...I rejoice."

Like Balaam, who received a fortune to curse the people and purpose of God, but only ended up blessing them - these gospel imposters were only serving to forward the purpose of Paul! Sure, God knew their hearts; they were not fooling Him. But if Jesus' name was forefront, how could that be a bad thing?

Even today there are men who take to the airwaves and internet for self-serving purposes. What then? There is a purported "revival" among university students hither and thither. What then?

What of those men's hearts? Is the "awakening" or "revival" real? I don't know, and I suppose time will tell. But... "What then?"

How does that impact your purpose? How does that impact your preaching? How does that impact your relationship and calling in Christ?

It shouldn't.

Let us rejoice that Jesus is on TV. Let us rejoice that He is in the news. Let us be glad His name is being brought before the masses.

"What then?"

### **Philippians 1:19-20**

*"for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death,"*

Why do you pray? Are you hoping your situation will change? Are you asking God to give you the courage and/or insight to get through a struggle? Is it simply a conversation with the Person

Who loves you more than you could know? Is it an arrow shot in desperation to Someone you wish would listen to you?

Valid or not, I'm sure I've prayed - and will continue to pray - all those kinds of prayers. You probably have - and will - too. And certainly we understand Paul's reliance on the prayers of his Philippian friends. I mean, after all, the guy is in jail! He's encountered countless afflictions and trials. Paul trusts that when God's people pray, God will accept their invitation to intervene in life's day-to-day. What a great comfort that must be.

And we would think we know what Paul is hoping God will do. We would think he is praying for release. If not for release, obviously he is praying for relief... right? I won't say that neither of those things ever crossed his mind or weren't ever on his "wish list". But note what his "eager expectation and hope" is: Paul defines his deliverance - not as his removal from suffering or even death - but as deliverance from shame.

Wouldn't it be a shame if after all he's said, done, and been through that he... gives up?

Wouldn't it be a shame if after all the preaching he did... it had no effect?

Wouldn't it be a shame if after he lived this way... Jesus gave up on him?

Wouldn't it be a shame if the grace Paul espoused didn't really cover him and he not only suffered in life, but the grave was truly his end.

Wouldn't it be a shame if, when he did die (because all of us will, Hebrews 9:27) the Church died with Him?

But Paul believes - yea "rejoices" in the fact (v.18) - that deliverance for him is a deliverance from shame - in any way - concerning the faith he preaches and lives. Regardless of what happens to him, Paul says "deliverance" is knowing that he has honored Christ - the Anointed of God - in his body. He's already established that as his purpose! (Philippians 1:12 devotion)

Friend, know this: if you put your hope in money - you'll be ashamed; if you put your hope in your personal legacy - you'll be ashamed; if you put your hope in family - you'll be ashamed; if you put your hope in government - you'll be ashamed; if you put your hope in "Church people" - you'll be ashamed.

Your hope, your expectation, must be honoring Jesus in your life and death. In this you will not be and cannot be ashamed. For in the same way God gave Abraham promises He gives them to us.

"...since He had no one greater by whom to swear, He swore by Himself...guaranteed it with an oath...it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the [expectation] set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, [an expectation]..." (Hebrews 6:13b, 17b-19a)

Why do you pray - for things that will leave you in shame? Or for the courage to remain unashamedly in Christ?

### **Philippians 1:21-22**

*"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell."*

How do you feel about living? I'd say most of us are pretty fond of it. How do you feel about dying? I'd say most are fairly wary. A friend I was speaking with recently summarized my feelings when he said, "I don't mind dying; I just don't want it to hurt!"

I suppose the "correct" answer to those questions comes down - again - to purpose, motivation, and the like. Many want to live to avoid death. Many want to die to avoid life. Some can't let loose of the earthly or worldly pleasure even for a more abundant life. Some can't find a purpose in life worth continuing on in the world. But Paul finds the balance that perhaps all of us should have daily: excited by the purpose and calling he has found in Jesus (3:14b), but looking through the "CROSShairs" at the ultimate goal to which he is running (3:14a).

How could any Christian, or just any created being for that matter, find anything more in life than being Jesus! How could we get any closer to the Creator than to be so united with Him that our daily living is Him?! We truly become, in almost literal fashion, the body of Christ in the world. So Paul says, for him, understanding his purpose and calling, "...to live is Christ"!

Are you, in that sense, Christ to your world? If so, that's a hard thing to give up! Yes, Jesus encountered disappointments and even persecutions as He went from place to place - but my, all the wonders He performed! And my the promise He made to those after Him, to whom He said,

"...whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do..."

Do you believe this? I think Paul did! He said "being Christ" meant "fruitful labor".

But then Paul knew, "...to die is gain." There is a holy selfishness to that. The command to "make disciples" and the life of purposeful "Jesus-ing" in the world does not consign us to a world of pains, disappointments, hurts, disease, and heartache forever. The "purpose of our purpose" is the restoration of complete relationship with God - a redemption of creation. It's OK to long for and look forward to that.

So do we want to live? Yes. Do we want to die? Sure. Just be content for now to live in the tension between the two - working while we are waiting.

### **Philippians 1:23-24**

*"I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account."*

Desire and necessity: Isn't that the age-old dichotomy?

From the Garden of Eden until today, we daily make choices between our desires and what is truly necessary. Some choices are mundane or have as few implications as whether or not we will have ice cream on our pie. (Wait... one could argue that ice cream is a necessity on pie.) Other choices have eternal consequences, if not for ourselves, for others.

Is it surprising to you that Paul would rather die than live? Does it amaze you that his desire-necessity question was answered completely opposite of most folks in our world?

The natural man's desire is to live. From the moment we are born we enter a struggle, a fight, literally "do the death" to live. It is a common cry from the pro-death, "baby-murder rights" crowd that with the over-turning of Roe V. Wade, so many children will be born into poverty. What!?! That is a racist & classist comment! I know many "poor" people. Certainly I know hundreds of people that live below the "poverty level". Guess what all of them are struggling to do? LIVE! It's only the evil man who believes the poor would rather be dead. I digress... but my point is this - given the "choice" for his own life - every man struggles to live!

The super-natural man is not only "OK" with death, he desires it. In death he knows he will truly live. He loves Jesus so much the comfort of His eternal and more palpable presence is what he longs for. It is because he is tired of a life of dying that he is ready to walk through the door-way of physical death to have the real life he is made for.

But Paul exhibits the next level of Christian maturity. The maturely super-natural man lives beyond his desire and lives in Christian necessity. As Jesus, His disciples don't live for themselves; they physically live for and in Jesus. And living for and in Jesus means that, as the body of Jesus, we go about doing the things the One singular Man-Jesus couldn't do. We spread throughout all the world making disciples and serving the lost - and one another. We make obedient-to-the-Word choices that glorify God. It is the necessity beyond our fondest desire. In Christian necessity, we quit dying (paradoxically the world's living) and begin the abundant life - here, now, in this grave-yard world - that Jesus promised and brought. To find and live life at this level is truly to "have your cake and eat it too".

Paul will describe this goal and prize he moves toward in chapter three by saying he is living in a way...

"that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."  
(Philippians 3:10-11)

Which way of life are you most settled in today: the natural, super-natural, or the maturely super-natural? Aim for the highest goal! Live and serve Jesus - life's real necessity - today!

## Philippians 1:25-26

*"Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again."*

In my general reading across different mediums, I have stumbled across a "rule-of-thumb". This rule states:

"The key to achieving true expertise in any skill is simply a matter of practicing, albeit in the correct way, for at least 10,000 hours."

The rule originates from Malcolm Gladwell's book, "Outliers: The Story of Success" Gladwell additionally says, "Practice isn't the thing you do once you're good. It's the thing you do that makes you good."

Few of us like "practicing" anything. The word "practice" brings up reminders of hours sitting on a piano bench playing scales to boredom. It floats memories to the top of our minds of laps ran mindlessly around a field or gym. Practice isn't fun. We want to get to the game. The problem is: without practice, we are not any good at the game. Or, even if we are, to stay at the same level with no challenge will make the most perfectly executed "game" boring.

Imagine playing little-league football. At first it's very difficult as a 5th grade child. You have to learn ten plays! It's hard to remember - and hard to execute. But by the end of the season, you are doing quite well. However, each year, rather than moving up the ranks playing teams your age and learning more and more intricate plays - you stick with those ten plays and continue to play against ten and eleven year old teams. Eventually at age 22 or 23, probably far sooner, you'd run every play perfectly and score every time the ball was snapped. Perfection! But boredom.

Does your walk with Jesus seem stale? Perhaps even - dare we say - boring? Note here that Paul tells the Philippians that joy comes with "progress in the faith!"(v.25) If you don't continue to progress in faith - if you are not seeking higher heights and deeper depths to both your understanding of the scripture and the practice of it, there will be no joy in it.

There are things that are easy to understand in the Bible. Any child can pick up on "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Matthew 7:12) But let's examine the priesthood of Melchizedek. Have you even heard of that? There is milk, and there is meat.

Not only will you become bored without progress, you will become defeated. You see, the practice of our faith is not running laps or playing scales or scrimmaging with our own teammates (like a Church service). The practice of our faith is "on the job training". And the enemy never stays at the same level. Life gets continually harder. What you learned yesterday is only the foundation of more intricate "plays" that must be run today! Faith must be practiced and applied as we go - hour by hour, minute by minute - daily. If we are not practicing and progressing, there is no "someday" when we will be ready to play; there is only defeat in the present.

Are you bored? Are you defeated? Are you skipping practice?

### **Philippians 1:27-28**

*“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”*

These verses constitute the text of the first sermon of a current revival series, so there is a lot I have to say about them. It’s difficult for me to think beyond those thoughts for now, but let me say this about “worth”. In short, to be “worthy of the gospel” means being “worth” the life of Jesus.

WHAT!?! How could Paul even ask that of us? Like a burned out house or a wrecked car, sin has so devastated our lives that we are a total loss. We are best scrapped and forgotten.

But I’m reminded of a poem beloved by one of my first mentors, Brother Fred Huckelbury. The poem (pasted below) describes an old violin up for auction. No one sees any value in it. Indeed, it has none. But then an old man comes from nowhere - out of the crowd. Taking the violin, tuning its strings and bow - he then proceeds to play it with such beauty and finesse that it commands a high price.

Our lives are definitely not worth the life of Jesus “as is”. But when the Master puts our lives in tune and plays us in harmony with His Spirit - we become a worthy part of a great symphony. All that is asked of us is that we allow God to continue to maintain us and reverberate the whisper of His grace from the repaired sound-post of our souls.

#### *The Touch of the Masters Hand*

*Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer thought it scarcely worth his while to waste much time on the old violin, but held it up with a smile;*

*"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,  
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"  
"A dollar, a dollar"; then two!" "Only two?  
Two dollars, and who'll make it three? Three dollars, once; three  
dollars twice; going for three.."*

*But no, from the room, far back, a gray-haired man came forward and picked up the bow;  
Then, wiping the dust  
from the old violin, and tightening the loose strings, he played a melody pure and sweet as  
caroling angel sings.*

*The music ceased, and the auctioneer, with a voice that was quiet and low, said;*

*"What am I bid for the old violin?" And he held it up with the bow.*

*A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two? Two thousand! And who'll make it three? Three thousand, once, three thousand, twice, and going and gone," said he.*

*The people cheered, but some of them cried, "We do not quite understand what changed its worth."*

*Swift came the reply: "The touch of a master's hand."*

*And many a man with life out of tune, and battered and scarred with sin,  
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd, much like the old violin,*

*A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine; a game - and he travels on. "He is going" once, and "going twice, He's going and almost gone."*

*But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd never can quite understand the worth of a soul and the change that's wrought by the touch of the Master's hand.*

*- Myra Brooks Welch*

### **Philippians 1:29-30**

*"For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have."*

What was the best gift you ever received? There are many gifts that come to my mind. Some of them were complete surprises, but some... well...

Particularly, I remember getting a Daisy Powerline 880 BB gun when I was a kid. Man! I wanted that rifle! I'm sure I was a lot like Ralphie in A Christmas Story, leaving hints everywhere. But I wasn't surprised like Ralphie. I'm a snooper. I had already found time and opportunity to go through my parents closet, and I was resting in quiet confidence that the longed-for prize was soon to come. That's a great thing too, in it's own way, isn't it - to not not only have your eyes on the prize, but to rest in the assurance that it is on the way?

That is surely a blessing of knowing Jesus. It's why we come to Him. We come in faith - trusting not only in Who He Is but what He will do! His committed love draws us to Him. These verses say that confidence itself is a gift bestowed upon us. When anyone will open His mind to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will impart the gift of faith if we will but receive it.

But I'm sure you also noticed the gift in these verses that perhaps we didn't know we'd be receiving! Oh, if we'd thought about it we might have suspected it. If we looked at what they did

to the Master we might guess. If we'd snooped about the scriptures a little more we might have seen it coming. But somehow... we just never realized...

"Part of your gift from God is that you should not only have the pleasure, promise, and hope of the trust and assurance you get in Jesus - but you have also been given the gift of continual suffering for Jesus sake - living in a war-zone like I have and still do." (my paraphrase)

Uh... thanks?

Paul will explain more about this gift as we go on, but just think about that a minute. Jesus said:

"Y'all know how to give good gifts - like Daisy Powerline 880 BB rifles - to your kids... Don't y'all think that our Father knows how to give good gifts?" (Matthew 7:11ish, Kinda Sorta Somethin Like That Version)

Christian, we will suffer. We will continue to suffer. It is for the sake of Jesus. (Again, Paul will say more later.) I don't know all the reasons why this is a good gift, but that's why we got the gift of trusting God first!

In the midst of suffering and chaos, I hear people say all the time - and I've said it, I'm sure, "Look what this world is coming to!" E. Stanley Jones in his book Abundant Living, said this:

"Early Christians did not say, 'Look what the world has come to,' but in delight, 'Look what has come to the world.' They saw not merely the ruin, but the resources.... They saw not merely the sin that did abound, but that grace did much more abound. ...something new had come into the world..."

THAT truly IS a gift!

### **Philippians 2:1-2**

*"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind."*

I saw a great video montage recently of former Montana Tech football coach Bob Green. (Look it up.) He had a quick wit and an arsenal of sayings for any and every occasion that could make your head spin. The Apostle Paul was a lot like that except that he had pretty much only two things he was trying to get across: One, the preeminence of the person of Jesus Christ and two, (as here in today's text) how we as Jesus' body live and move. Paul was quick with an storehouse of illustrations, ideas, and directions on how Christians should live together.

He begins today's passage by reminding us of what we have in Christ, and - therefore - what we need to make sure we build together as the Church. The list of what we already have: comfort from love (Isn't it comforting to know that Jesus loves you? Regardless of what you have ever done... knowing every single fact about you - more than you yourself know... Jesus loves you!), participation in the Spirit (There are no "side-line" or "second-string" Christians! Life and the

Church's mission is big enough for everyone to compete, and, likewise, everyone has the strength and ability for their role through the power of the Holy Spirit!), affection and sympathy (If you have any of it, he says... any at all for one another - if you care one iota about others in God's Church who struggle like the Apostle and like you...).

If you have those things (And you can't really call yourself a disciple of Jesus without them now can you?), then let Paul rest in knowing that you are now going to:

One, "be of the same mind". While that seems impossible, it doesn't mean having to know the mind of others - or really even your own - it means sharing the mind of Christ! We have this ability through the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:16) Though some people may have accused you of being "out of your mind"... the problem, rightly put, is that we are all too into our minds! We are out of His mind! If all in the body of Christ think with the mind of Jesus, we will work in unity. Christ is not psychotic.

Two, we should be "having the same love". Do we foster love for the things God loves and hate the things God hates? Again, when we have commonality with God, we have commonality with one another.

Three, we should be "being in full accord with one mind". That is, once we all think as/with Jesus... once we all love what He loves... we will then - and only then - function in unity.

And when it "has been granted to you" that you "suffer for [Christ's] sake" (see last week), wouldn't it be helpful if we were in harmony and united in strength as we all endure it?

### **Philippians 2:3-4**

*"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

In the 2000 movie "O Brother, Where Art Thou?", a modern retelling of Homer's Odyssey, one of the characters is an incumbent Southern governor. He is in the middle of the political race of his life as reconstruction has come to the South. He is behind in the polls to the candidate of "re-form" that is going to "sweep the state clean" of corruption. Incumbent Pappy O'Dan'l is encouraged to "press the flesh", to "get us some of that re-form" - all to no avail.

However, at the end of the movie, he sees a great crowd that is cheering on the Soggy Bottom Boys. Though escaped criminals, the Soggy Bottom Boys have become sort of musical folk heroes and Robin Hoods. When it becomes clear that the "re-form" candidate is against the people's heroes, Governor Pappy O'Dan'l pardons the Soggy Bottom Boys of their "misdemeanorin'" and promises them a place in his next administration - winning him the popularity of the people.

Well, Paul never saw Southern politics in action - but nevertheless, things were evidently no different in the age of the Roman Senate. When he speaks here of "selfish ambition", he is making a direct parallel to the unprincipled electioneering of his day. Even since the first century (and before?), politicians had evidently been willing to say anything people wanted to hear to

further themselves. And, evidently, he'd seen the same thing happen in the Church! Haven't you? I have.

Paul has been telling them to stand firm (1:27), but there were a lot of Christians who were willing to bend with the winds of popularity to "get ahead". Their desire to be "on top", their inability to see themselves mere humble servants in God's Kingdom, caused them to look past others' needs.

Check. Same here.

In addition, many congregations today "relieve themselves" of biblical doctrine and complicate the function of Christ's body with silliness to try and prove their "relevance" to the world or cater to a particular person or faction in the Church.

Look at the Word. Use it as the mirror to see our true standing before God, and our conceit will melt away. Then we can truly minister to ourselves and others as God intends.

### **Philippians 2:5-6**

*"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,"*

There is a word we see a lot today... "Equality".

In the '60's, one side said, "Separate, but equal," was good enough. The other side said, "No, it's not 'equal' if it's separate." In the '70's, one group said, "Equal jobs demand equal pay." Nowadays, a new version of "equal" is non-binary, ie, we are told there is not even any difference between men and women - that line is non-existent; we are all equal already!

Sometimes "equality" makes sense - sometimes it is the height of a ridiculous, mindless mob (as in the last example). But here is my point... All of us try to hold on to some sort of equality. We want to be held with the same honor as... well, whatever it is we truly see as worthy (or what we truly worship?).

Before Paul gets to the "mind" or "attitude" that we are to have - one that is ours in Christ Jesus if we will accept it - He tells us what Jesus' attitude was. He...

"...did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,"

If you were going to hold on to anything, would it not be the deity that is your very fiber? That is the pinnacle! But Jesus let go of it. Why?

Because He had a job to do. He had a calling. He had a mission. And it was impossible to accomplish that mission and still keep a lock on Who He was in total. While still totally deity, He had to let go of equality. He was still God, but He had to submit. Now... if Jesus had to

submit to do what He was called to do... why do we - how can we - continue to hold on to anything but our identity in Christ?

Do you put great stock in your position at work? Can you let it go - think nothing of it - when it counter-crosses the direction of the Savior's call?

Do you have a great pride in your position as a father or mother - or as the child of someone important? Is it more important than your spiritual calling?

Do you have an ability that brings you adulation? Do you have some possessions that make you an object of envy? Are they dedicated for God's use, or even released when they hold you back from the mission God's given for your life?

What is it that you should not consider "a thing to be grasped,"?

### **Philippians 2:7-8**

*"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."*

It happened every single Sunday of my church-going childhood. When the men taking up the offering arrived at the back of the auditorium, the organist hit "the chord". At the sound of "the chord", everyone rose from their seats. And while the offering was carried back down the center aisle to the communion table, we all sang The Doxology.

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow!  
Praise Him all creatures here below!  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host!  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! Amen!

It was like The Star-Spangled Banner of Church! As a kid, I didn't really understand why The Doxology fit there. I figured "doxology" must mean "money" or something.

"Doxology" is actually Latin, by way of Greek. It is a compound word meaning "glory" (dox) and "ology" (study of). It can also mean, based on context, "opinion" or "belief" (dox) and "words" or "statement" (ology). I think both ideas apply to The Doxology. When we sing The Doxology, we are saying, "Hey! After studying God's glory, here's what I believe! This is my conclusion."

All that to say this... when Jesus became man, He did not cease being God. But He did relinquish His "grasp" (see previous devotion) on equality with the Father. He let loose of that and "emptied Himself" of His glory. (v.7) And did you notice what that made Him?

It made Him like a man.

The Doxology not only says something about God, it says something about us! It says God is glorious; it is from Him all blessings flow (James 1:17), and it is He that is worthy of being praised - both in heaven and on earth! And, by default, it says neither are we the purveyors of our own blessing, nor are we worthy of praise!

Like water from a pitcher, Jesus emptied Himself (v.7) and humbled Himself (v.8) - even to the point of dying in the most excruciating and shameful way possible. He poured out and wiped the pitcher of His glory dry. When Jesus, God the Son, went to this extent to serve His Kingdom, how is it that we can still be so full of ourselves? Until we empty ourselves of... ourselves (as we have no glory of our own), we have no room for the glory of God through His Spirit. Even while the Spirit of God may reside in us through our initial submission to Him in immersion, we smother Him in self-praise and block His powerful moving wind by our massive egos.

When you study glory, just what statement of belief are you making? It comes through more in your lifestyle than the words of a song sung on Sunday morning.

### **Philippians 2:9-11**

*"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."*

Decisions, decisions! I remember my wife asking one of our granddaughters to make a choice between a few things. Her response? "Umm... You pick, Grammy, I'm not a very good decider."

When out to lunch with some folks after church services recently, the waiter brought the food. The preacher looked over at someone else's plate and remarked, "I shoulda had that!"

That's us alright. We are a people who have trouble with decisions, and often we regret the one we make very quickly. When we have trouble deciding what to wear, why should we decide our station in life? God knows exactly for what and for when He has fitted us.

Jesus, knowing that truth, humbled Himself - not considering His equality with God something to be grasped - and took the form of the entity without glory - man. Yet, that did not mean that He would never receive the honor due Him. When He humbled Himself and followed His call, He put Himself in a position to be exalted. As they say, "When you're at the bottom, ain't no way to go but up!" And when it was time, the Father exalted Him to His right hand. And one day, Jesus will receive praise from every person who has ever lived in time and space (yes, including you!).

And, in just the same way that Paul tells us we must have this attitude of humility, Peter tells us that - in due time - we will also receive our glory!

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you," (1 Peter 5:7)

Yes, Christian, there is a prize worth "pressing on" toward! (Philippians 3:14 - We'll get to that later!) But your "due" must come in God's timing because even that is for His purpose! Did you note the end of verse 11?

"...every knee should bow...every tongue confess...to the glory of God the Father." (emphasis mine)

Wait for God. You can't choose your socks; don't believe that you can choose your time!

### **Philippians 2:12-13**

*"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."*

A preacher I know recently received a call from someone who had attended his congregation's services. This individual wanted to come back to the church house and be immersed. My preacher friend was excited that someone had heard what was preached, gone on to consider it, and decided she was ready to submit to Christ.

Well... at least that's what he initially thought had happened.

As he visited with her, she mentioned that she'd been baptized before. (Now, you can only be truly baptized once - but that is a different discussion.) As it turns out, she felt her former immersion was not valid. "Why not?" asked the preacher. "I don't think the man who immersed me was a real 'pastor'."

(As an aside, one does not have to be immersed by a "pastor" - but again... different discussion.)

"And why do you think that?" asked the preacher.

"Because I haven't stopped sinning yet!"

While the work of grace, mercy, forgiveness... while the sanctification, redemption, and justification are complete when we submit ourselves to Jesus... needing absolutely nothing to be added by our feeble selves to save - we are not left out of the sanctimonious living process by any means! Paul has already called us to live lives worthy of the good news. (1:27) While we can never be worthy of grace, on the opposite side of the baptistry, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, we are enabled (v.13) - yea, commanded - to live new lives worthy of unmerited favor.

So, Paul tells the Philippians here, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling". Our salvation is to have the effect of causing us to now obey God. Our submission was not only for forgiveness, but for filling, and also for fruitfulness! Would should tremble with fear at how close we came to the perilous edge of hell's abyss, and - even without apostolic oversight - gladly live lives freed of sin and not just its consequences.

Are you ready for a good work-out? Go work out that salvation today!

### **Philippians 2:14**

*"Do all things without grumbling or disputing."*

I come to do a bit of confession today. Wanna know one of the greatest besetting sins of my life?

Grumbling.

Grumbling, both in both the original language the Apostle Paul wrote and in English, is an onomatopoeic word. (How's that for a \$25 word?) It simply means this (if you don't remember from high school English): a word that sounds like what it is. That is, when we "grumble" it often sounds like the word. We "grrr...umble...and mmm...umble" under our breath about all sorts of various things. It's that relatively "silent" complaining we do by ourselves or sometimes before others to passively show our displeasure.

Are you a grumbler? Think about the last time you were in traffic before you deny it.

What's the big deal about grumbling?

Grumbling is really the symptom of a prideful heart. Paul has been talking about the humility of Jesus here in chapter 2. He's asked us to have a Christ-like attitude. He calls us to empty ourselves of... ourselves and to quit grasping to be God's equal. Grumbling is the opposite of that because it says, "I don't deserve this!"

"I don't deserve...

...to be treated this way."

...to go through this trial."

...this imposition."

...etc, etc."

Really? What is it you do deserve? The very fact that you are alive to endure whatever it is - from the trivial to the tragic is a grace and a mercy. In a fallen world where terrible things happen to the nicest of people every day, why wouldn't some bad stuff happen to you? And if really bad stuff happens to others, how could I be immune to just relatively small, "first-world" problems?

The other problem is that grumbling leads to the second part of the verse - disputing. Disputing is when we now take our prideful displeasure to action. We begin to argue. Sometimes it's with others (as Paul will address in chapter 4) - and sometimes it's even with God! The fact that we think grumbling isn't really that big of a deal shows that we are already in a dispute - with God! He has just said it's a big deal!

Are you prone to grumbling like I am? Check your pride at the door today! We don't deserve any more than anyone else - certainly no more than Jesus. Let's look at life with more gratitude and thankfulness - and take God's Word for what it says, without dispute.

### **Philippians 2:15-16**

*"that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain."*

I remember when digital watches first came out. I'm no scientist or engineer, so I can't tell you why, but I remember that "in the light of day" or at least when the sun was just right, they were a little hard to read. The contrast was still a bit "off". In verses 15-16, Paul gives us more reasoning about why we are to have the humility of Christ (and therefore not grumble). It is because our lives are to have contrast.

You would think that in the "midst of a crooked and twisted generation" like the one we live in today, Christians would be a "high-contrast" lot of people! Well, we would be if we had the humility of Jesus (along with all His other Holy traits). Unfortunately, like that age-old simile of the frog in the waterpot of ever-increasing temperature, the Church is only "relatively holy" - if at all. Instead of an increasing gap between the body of Christ and the world, the gap stays the same while both just move down the scale into the acceptance of more sin and degradation of the likeness of Jesus.

What one - even seemingly small - part of your life today could you "re-conquer" in Jesus' name? Where have you let your guard down? Where has your holiness slacked? Where have you allowed "moderation" in your approach to sin vs. holiness? Add some contrast to your life this week. Whether in the light of the noon-day sun or the black darkness of the sinful corners of the world - let Jesus show up in your life!

### **Philippians 2:17-18**

*"Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me."*

A commercial we see occasionally asks a very thought provoking question: "What would you do for a Klondike Bar?" Old commercials featured anything from someone standing in front of a knife thrower to big burley men playing paddy-cake in public. Would you put yourself in physical danger? Would you be willing to suffer embarrassment? Apparently, we should be!

But let's ask this: "What would you do to bring someone else to a saving faith in Jesus Christ?"

As Paul has been talking about what he has suffered for the good news, he's already said he's not afraid to die. In fact, it kinda sounds like he'd prefer it! He says, to die would be gain! But he really couldn't make up his mind because living is "being Christ" to people. It gives him the

opportunity to help other people. (1:21-24) And he will say in chapter 2 that he is hoping to come and visit them once again in Philippi. (2:24) But he says here that he will "be glad to rejoice with you all" even if he is "poured out as a drink offering...upon your faith".

A drink offering is wine poured on a sacrifice and is first mentioned in Genesis 35:14. Drink offerings represented and foreshadowed the blood that Jesus would spill on the cross. Jesus spoke about this in Luke 22:20 when He took the cup at the last supper that He said represented His blood and said it would be "poured out for you".

What is Paul saying then? He is saying that the faith of the Philippians... their salvation that he has labored for and suffered for is an offering he has made/is making to God. And even if he has to sacrifice his life's blood for them... even if his life's blood is added to the offering of himself he's already made on their behalf... he's "glad" to do it and "rejoice[s] with [them] all" in their salvation.

Wow.

I can see being willing to suffer - even die because of my faith.

I am and have been willing to suffer some to bring saving faith to others. I could stand being embarrassed. I could be "uncomfortable". I'm willing to be fired from my job. I have given up time at home and with my family. But would I do what Paul said he would?

What would you do for someone to come to faith in Jesus...

...Someone like the notoriously wicked Ninevites to which Jonah and Nahum preached.

...Someone who doesn't seem to even want to hear about Jesus.

...Someone, well... anyone...

Is there anyone for which you would spill your life's blood, unto death, that they might be saved? And would you be glad to do it and rejoice with them in their salvation at that cost?

Every single one of us have been bought by the blood of Jesus. Should we be willing to give less?

### **Philippians 2:19-20**

*"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare."*

When I was thirteen years old, a man made a very profound statement to me. I was sitting next to my preacher behind the pulpit of our church. The organist and pianist were playing the prelude when he quietly leaned over and said, "Greg, I've been praying about this... and I want you to be my 'Timothy'." I didn't really to what he meant, but because of my great respect for him, I just said, "Yes, sir."

From then on, without really even knowing what it meant to be a "Timothy" and without really even knowing it was happening - one of my life's greatest mentors began teaching me about being an evangelist and, more importantly, what it meant to follow Jesus. I've looked back on that moment countless times through the decades. That invitation to "...join in imitating me..." (3:17) has kept me doing what I do for almost thirty-five years.

While Jesus was obviously the best New Testament example of how to call and make disciples, the Apostle Paul becomes the example of "next generation" disciple-making. Paul set out to teach others personally like Jesus taught him personally. (Galatians 1:12) The Timothy mentioned in Philippians 2:19 was the "OT" (Original Timothy). He was one of the first men he invited to follow him, and he became the one we see the disciple-making relationship in most detail.

That being said, could we note a few things about making or being disciples (Timothys) just from these two verses?

One, disciples are extensions of ourselves. Paul was in jail. He couldn't get to Philippi to see his friends in faith personally, but he could send Timothy. We don't appreciate this fully in our day and age of instant access to almost any part of the world immediately via the internet. But that's not the only way that "Timothys" can help. Even Jesus did not do all the work of proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom and calling for repentance alone. He sent thirty-six pair of men - seventy-two men! (Jesus had many more disciples than just the twelve with which He spent the most time.) Have you ever complained about "having" to do something (or many somethings) "all by myself"? Perhaps you've not been doing the work of making disciples!

Two, disciples are sent. While disciples might be helpful to our daily work, our Timothys - in the end - belong to God! They are sent to make their own "Timothys" just like we are. As a Timothy, do you resist branching out in your own ministry? Have you been content to be a follower and never a "Paul" to anyone else?

The truth is that all of us should be a "Paul" - a discipler, a Timothy-maker - in obedience to Jesus' command to do so. (Matthew 28:18-20) And we will need to learn to do that by being a "Timothy" of someone else. Until we are both those people, how can we really say that we "count others more significant than [ourselves]"?

### **Philippians 2:21-22**

*"For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel."*

pride

noun:

1. a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of those with whom one is closely associated, or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired. 2. consciousness of one's own dignity.

There is a lot that could be written about pride. I won't say that I searched the Bible completely on the subject, but a quick concordance glance revealed this: There is not one verse of the Bible that promotes, exalts, or otherwise instructs us to be proud! (Let me know if you find one!) In fact, the only verse I could find that spoke positively about pride was in Psalm 47 where the Sons of Korah (one of my favorite ol' time gospel groups) sing with pride of the "heritage" that "...Yahweh, the Most High...chose...*for us*" (italics mine). That is, the only thing worthy of prideful admiration in scripture is what God chose for us. The inference is that we would never have chosen that for ourselves! Proof? Look at the choices between godliness and ungodliness - things eternal vs. things earthly - that mankind makes every single day!

In contrast to the world who has a whole month now to celebrate the pleasure, satisfaction, and dignity they feel in their depravity (They do not really feel these things in their sin. It is as disgusting and abhorred by them as us. It leaves them feeling as empty as any sin leaves anyone. However, they do feel pleasure and satisfaction in flaunting their rebellion before God.), Philippians 2 has been all about the antithesis of pride. It is about humility:

- The release of "equality" by Jesus (v.6),
- The deferring of our rights as we quit grumbling (v.14),
- The sacrifice of life (possibly) by Paul on behalf of the Philippians faith (v.17),
- And now the Kingdom-mindedness of Timothy (v.18).

This will not even be the end of the pride-lessness that Paul exhibits or describes in the lives of others in his letter.

Is it wrong for us to feel "a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction...from one's own achievements, [or] the achievements of those with whom one is closely associated..."?

I do feel a certain sense of accomplishment when I look at the yard I just mowed. When I finish a sermon in which I've been laboring, I feel good. When I see the things that my progeny do or accomplish, I smile. I think the God that invented true pleasure put that "good feeling" in us. Solomon said, "So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot....". (Ecclesiastes 3:22a)

The key is: a) Do we recognize God in our abilities and accomplishments? b) Are we satisfied with our "lot"? (Or are we malcontent?)

Timothy saw his lot for what it was. He was to serve the interests of Christ's Kingdom and not his own. He was satisfied with that alone, rather than personal elevation and gain. It made him a man of proven worth.

What about you? Is your pleasure and satisfaction in what God has done in/through you and chosen for you? Or are you proud of "your" accomplishments as you seek your own interests?

## Philippians 2:23-24

*"I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also."*

I remember being in my college class entitled "Personal Evangelism". Our professor a former Evangelist in located ministry (and a good one from what I'd heard) had been explaining to us how he brought a person to a saving faith in Jesus.

The short of the long story was that he had met this guy somewhere and began forging a friendship. It was a relationship he really enjoyed, and the guy had become a real friend. However, on another level, he just wasn't reaching him with the good news. However, our professor had an acquaintance who shared a lot of common interests with his new friend. He introduced the two. He explained that, eventually, the new friend became closer and friends with his acquaintance than with him - so much so that he hardly ever saw the guy anymore. While he missed his friend, he was glad for a new relationship that he had forged because it was the other guy who related to him on a level and in such a way as to bridge the gap between his friend and the gospel.

His point? Sometimes you might have to even lose a friend for the sake of evangelism!

A student in the class threw up his hand. "Professor! You gave up a friend for evangelism!?"

"Why yes, Bob, and I'd do it again."

"I can't believe that!" the student cried. "You really gave up a friend for evangelism?!"

Could you give up a deep relationship so someone else could know Jesus too?

The Apostle Paul has told us already he'd give his own life for the faith. In other New Testament scriptures he recounts other things he's suffered. And, it's one thing for us to suffer alongside others... maybe we can bear that... but when it comes to severing relationships?... relationships we count on for support and sanity... man, that's tough.

Take it from a guy who has lived apart from parents, brother, sister, extended family and hometown to go where God calls. Take it from a guy who's a parent himself and is separated from sons and granddaughters because they are serving where God has called. It's tough.

From time to time, we may "trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also" and be reunited... but the call of God in the short, quickly-passing span called life demands we go! And if we are not the ones going, sometimes life demands we send. It is for the sake of the gospel and salvation of others.

And... when you think about it. Isn't that just exactly what God did for us? He sent Jesus. Jesus went. They suspended their relationship, that we might be saved.

## Philippians 2:25-26

*"I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill."*

Something I hear a lot and that is very distressing is this phrase... "a personal relationship with Jesus Christ". Now, I know the intent of that phrase. It means that there is a distinction between knowing about Jesus and knowing Him personally. I've heard a lot about my great-great grandfather, but I never had a personal relationship with him. But I fear that the phrase, probably most unknowingly - if it hasn't taken on a different meaning entirely - has taken on an ugly manifestation. What I'm saying is that our "personal relationship" with Jesus becomes quite that. Personal. Very personal. And only personal.

Yet the Bible teaches so much more! Even in the Old Testament, half the "Commandments" are about how our participation in God's community makes us relate to other people in a different way. Most generally speaking, scripture pushes, yea commands us, to relate to people in a loving way! The parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35) and the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) are prime examples of how our relationship with God changes our relationship with others. Jesus Himself said that while the greatest commandment was to love God, the second greatest commandment (Think about that... of all the things we could do...) is to love others as much as we love ourselves.

Paul, Timothy, and now Epaphroditus all demonstrate that kind of love for others - the kind Jesus had for us - in chapter 2. Epaphroditus, had been sick (as we will read, he almost died from his illness). Somehow word had traveled all the way to "the folks back home". Knowing their deep concern for him, it distresses him. ("Mama's gonna be worried about me!") These men cared for the welfare of others (v.20): spiritually (v.21), mentally (v.26), and physically (v.30).

What do you think about you and me? Are we that concerned? We don't have to get on a boat and travel a thousand miles... we can pick up a phone, send a text, or video message... practically anywhere around the world. We have all kinds of practical opportunities to care for others near us - in spiritual, mental, and physical ways. Do we? Will we?

Or is our "relationship" with Jesus too personal?

## Philippians 2:27-28

*"Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious."*

If you're like me, sometimes you think back on your life and what "might have been". "If only I had/hadn't" might be starters to a lot of daydreams of grandeur. Or maybe you blame your lost fame, fortune, and/or fabulous future on what someone else did or didn't do. Or maybe it was just the "times" you were born in... the circumstances of life.

"Things would sure be better, if only..."

Seldom, if ever, do we think about that from which we may have been saved! But oh how it could be worse! I wonder how many times God has intervened in our lives when we don't even know He did! Certainly, Paul had been praying for his friend and was less than surprised when he was healed. But that doesn't take away what Paul calls God's mercy here.

Someone once said, "We don't know what we don't know." And so, of course, we can never tell in this world from what God may have saved us. But I'm pretty sure there's been a lot! Rejoice in that today. Be thankful for what you do have and where you are. We are here by God's mercy!

### **Philippians 2:29-30**

*"So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me."*

Paul has spent the chapter talking about honor. Jesus honored the Father in submission. Paul honored the Church in ministry. Timothy honored Paul in faithful service. Epaphroditus honored the Philippians by risking his life to be the hands and feet of Jesus to Paul.

The point now turns to the Philippians. What about them? We will see more in the letter about loving one another and looking to others needs, but here Paul makes a specific charge: honor Epaphroditus - and men like him.

We don't exactly know who Epaphroditus was in regard to his "office" (for lack of a better term). He may have been the evangelist at Philippi, an overseer, a deacon - or just a friend, missionary, or disciple of Paul's from his time there. In any case, he was to be honored, and we need to give more honor today to men who serve God faithfully.

There was a time in our country when preachers were men given honor by the community. Even if a man didn't believe in God, he respected the position of the preacher as a moral leader in the community. Elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers - they were all people of honor - at least within the congregation. Sadly, that time has long-since passed in many, if not most, regions of our country - and many times - in our congregations.

No doubt, there are "men of the cloth" who are not, by any means, truly faithful servants. There are those who "draw a check" and do little work. There are those who just enjoy a position of authority and don't love the sheep. But this has always been the case (1:15-17). Nevertheless, faithful men like Epaphroditus should hold our respect and be honored among us.

Do you listen and implement the preacher's words from the pulpit as they stream from the Bible? Or do you bad-mouth the sermon at the Sunday dinner table? Do you encourage your young men to be like him? Or would you rather them "do something important" with their life?

Do you obey the overseers of the Church as they lead the congregation? Or do you grumble, complain, and make their work a misery?

No one is asking for laurels and trophies. But Paul says - God says - they are to be honored.

### **Philippians 3:1-2**

*"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh."*

I've always loved dogs. From the time I was a little boy, our family had a pet beagle hound, and throughout my life, whenever there was opportunity, I had a dog. In our home, and largely throughout our culture, dogs are "man's best friend". They are beloved companions and sometimes guardians and guides.

But the Jewish culture, in which Paul and many early Christians were raised, would not have viewed dogs so fondly. In the Old Testament, they were considered unclean and vicious. Their work was equal to, or a metaphor for, prostitution. They are said to feed on corpses and maul people. So when Paul calls people dogs here, (Gasp! The Apostle Paul [the Holy Spirit!] called people names?! How "unkind"!\*) his readers "get it".

Paul says that those who are going about demanding that Christians also be Jews - that they not only follow Jesus, but also the law - are dogs. They are literally telling people to mutilate themselves (be circumcised) for no godly reason. Their desire for people to be keepers of the law already fulfilled by Jesus actually causes spiritual uncleanliness and destroys rather than restores people. They call people to be like them - not Jesus. Dirty dogs they are indeed!

Rather, Paul says, rejoice in the Lord. He'd already talked about being in the Lord and already spoken of rejoicing (And he will again later - it's a whole "theme" kinda thing.). It doesn't trouble him to keep telling them. Why is it so important? Because when we know our position "in the Lord" - the place we reside when we are immersed into Christ (Galatians 3:27), the identity that covers us when we identify with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4) - it becomes our safeguard. In Jesus, we have no need of ritual law-keeping. We have no need to please others' traditions. We are free in Jesus of those things.

Today, we don't have people barging into congregations telling people to mutilate their flesh, but have you ever felt you were "serving Jesus" just to meet someone else's expectation? You may want to serve God, but you do it how others tell you to - not in the way Jesus has gifted and call you to. You may be being "hounded" by "the dogs". Look out for those kind of Christians. Rejoice today in the Lord! Serve Him!

\*[While we should probably refrain from "calling names"... we are not the Holy Spirit nor even an Apostle... let's not be afraid to "call Bible things by Bible names" and say what the scripture says about anything. Rightly divide and loving apply the Word of God - even when it says what others may consider to be "unkind".]

### Philippians 3:3-4

*"For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh - though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:"*

Beginning when I was in junior high school, I found my motivation. The kids "on top" at school wore letter jackets - many of them not only adorned with stripes, letters, etc - but also with medals. It was flashy hardware worn on top of other achievements that said, "I won." Certain medals or achievements may have been for the team's effort or celebrated the whole band - but there were medals for individual performance.

I wanted medals. And I got a lot of them.

Our culture's motivation is self. From the very beginning, Adam and Eve wanted to be more than who they were, have more than what they had, and gain heights that seemed unreachable. Cain's murder of Able... the tower of Babel... Lamech's revenge... all those events were the same in reality. And it all happened in the first eleven chapters of the Bible. The whole collection of books that is the Bible tells the same story over and over.

So, it should be no surprise that from the very beginning of the Church, people who were baptized into Christ - whole "groups" of them - wanted to bring their medals with them and try to motivate others to reach the same status. But Paul offers this choice:

You can have what Jesus gives, or you can have what you bring. But you cannot have both.

The Church is not to be like the world! (That seems to be a foreign idea to many Christians and congregations today!) We don't glory in self. We don't even glory in our "group". Those who are of the real circumcision (not the act done with human hands in which this particular group wanted to revel) - truly marked by grace - are those who do not seek their own glory, but glory in Christ.

Paul says, "Look, if you want to list statistical achievements - let's go! I'll go first. I have more than any of you." (We'll see his impressive chest full of medals next week.) But that's just the problem. There will always be another level to which you can rise, and there will always be someone else who has done it already. Records are made to be broken.

But what Jesus did on the cross ends the striving. In Him, we have received everything we need. We don't need accolades and achievements. There is nothing left to do but to serve the One who has provided all.

It would really be a freeing kind of concept... if you're willing to embrace it.

### **Philippians 3:5-6**

*"circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless."*

Two hundred twelve degrees.

When enough energy is put into water that it reaches two hundred twelve degrees, the water begins to boil, and that energy is transferred through the water into steam. What happens from there? Well, if the steam is captured, it can be used to do something - like what happens in a steam engine. If not, it simply evaporates.

The word that is translated "zeal" for us here in our English Bible is that idea. It's a "boiling point". It is literally the roar and the hiss of steam leaving the pot. Paul says what he really "got heated up over" was Jesus... and not in a good way. The thought of grace, evidently, made his blood "boil". After all the work he's done... after all the status he's earned (?)... "now these people come along..." Satan "captured" that energy, and it was put to use persecuting the very body of the grace-giving Jesus, the Church!

Notice this as well... boiling does nothing for the water. In fact, if you boil it long enough, it will cease to exist in its current form. It will boil away into apparent nothingness if not captured for the locomotive energy of something else. When we allow something (or someone) to "boil us over", it is not going to be for our own good. We are simply a conduit of something (really someone's) energy being transferred into power for their agenda! Given enough pressure - self will cease to exist.

The point is this: you will die; you will end. Your life can be taken by your pursuits and leave you with nothing at the end (simply having been used by the world for its benefit), or you can die to self and live for, and in, Christ.

The choice is yours.

### **Philippians 3:7-8**

*"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ"*

Imagine a guy who is a high school basketball coach. Sports is his life. No one ever thought he would rise to this level, but now he coaches the best team, in the biggest school, from the toughest state in which to compete. He is almost through the championship game of the season. His team has not only dominated every game that season, but is dominating one of their fiercest rivals in the final... when he forfeits the game.

You rise to become owner and CEO of the world's largest widget company. Your product can barely be produced fast enough. Your bank accounts are overflowing with money. You can barely find places to invest all your capital. You have multiple homes; you have cars for any occasion; you have more money on top of possessions that it is even humanly possible to spend... and then - you just walk away. You sign it over to someone - anyone - and walk away with the shirt on your back.

I could go on, but these two examples illustrate what Paul is saying about all those "medals" he earned being a Pharisee. He was at the very top of his game. He was unmatched by any in his piety. But he "forfeited"... he walked away... he "wrote everything off" as a loss... to follow a man crucified as a criminal against the state.

Why? What could possibly be that good of a trade-off to give up succeeding in your life's chosen work? Paul will outline more as we go on, but it begins with this. Beyond all for which Paul strived - or beyond all for which we could today - is this simple, yet miraculous thing: knowing Christ Jesus.

Paul says that just knowing Jesus is of surpassing worth. Skip all the other stuff - the perks that come along with it; we'll get to that. But to know Him.

While most look to conquer creation, those who seek real treasure want to find the Creator. If there is anything today that stands in the way of you making time to know Jesus - or if you already know Him, just to talk to Him and spend time with Him today - leave it. Nothing is worth missing Jesus today.

Nothing.

### **Philippians 3:9-10**

*"and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith - that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,"*

I remember a time when, as a young married couple, my wife and I took a trip to the city. I wanted to show her a nice time, and we went to a kind of expensive restaurant. Imagine my embarrassment, when after having enjoyed the meal, my credit card was declined! That was certainly a situation in which I did not want to be found.

Have you ever been found in a place or situation of which you were embarrassed or ashamed? Many times, what makes it worse is that we should have known better.

When Paul knew better, he did better! Paul says he is glad to have made a different choice than he had in the past. Letting go of his "medals", he has chosen Christ. And more than that, he will now be able to "be found in Him". And being found in Christ is... well, it's everything!

When we are immersed in water in response to God's offer of salvation - repenting and confessing our faith - the Bible says we are immersed "into Christ" and have "put on" Christ. (Galatians 3:27) That makes John 3:16 - perhaps the most well-known verse of the Bible - mean so much more.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Scripture declares that it's not enough to just give intellectual assent to Who Jesus is (James 2:19), so surely that is not all that is meant by Jesus when He speaks these words to Nicodemus in John 3. But to have faith that has enveloped our lives - to have faith in the promises and Truth of God from the spiritual position of being in Him... now that's really something!

Paul says it means that we will no longer "be found" relying on our own righteousness (an embarrassing spot indeed), but a righteousness from God. That righteousness by faith - a faith that is in Him... it's the receipt that says "PAID IN FULL"!

### **Philippians 3:11-12**

*"that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own."*

My best friend and I have an acronym that we try to live by and use to encourage one another: "WEIT". WEIT (pronounced "we it") stands for "what-ever it takes". And, if it is only us - then so be it - "We it!" But we will do "whatever it takes" to accomplish the mission Jesus has given us in His Church.

Maybe Paul's acronym is: B-AMP'd! (Pronounced "Be Amped") He is energized by God's Spirit that "By any means possible" he will be and obtain all to which Jesus has called him - chiefly a new life, resurrection from the dead. It is a new life both now and in eternity.

But "by any means possible" is certainly a strong statement, isn't it? Isn't Paul overplaying things a bit? No, it really echos what Jesus said when He told people exactly what it would take to follow Him.

"...If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)

Turning your back on yourself (and all your previous accomplishments as Paul has said) is one thing. But take it a step further; take up your cross. The cross is an instrument of capital punishment. It's a public death sentence. More is required to follow Jesus than a quiet, secret "attempt" at a new morality. It is a public denial and death of self that renders one incapable of any more self-interest. In all practicality, it really is the only way one could follow Jesus. And that is what is required - the ONLY "means possible" to make Him - and His resurrection "our own".

Why? Because this is the path that Jesus took to make us His own!

And I really don't even like that word "us" because that's not the word Paul used. He used the word "me". Jesus took - not a secret path, not a half-hearted path - but the path of a public death to make YOU His own. How could we give less than "any means possible"? How could we give any less than "whatever it takes"?

Today, B-AMP'd! because WEIT!

### **Philippians 3:13-14**

*"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

I don't know if it is still on the air or not, but I remember a show on PBS radio called "For Your Consideration". I don't know that I ever listened to it much, but the show would cover a wide array of topics - probably leaning to a liberal, governmental perspective - and say that they were bringing this to you "For Your Consideration".

Paul says that when we leave all behind... when we make every effort... when we are "B-AMP'd! because WEIT! (see the previous devotion)... consider this: that's not the end of it. A commitment doesn't end with words; it moves forward in action! That action is a result of a calling upon our lives - the "upward call of God"!

I just left Southern California, and - all pre-conceived ideas about California behind - there was great revival in the congregation I preached in for the week. My wife and I stuck around the Sunday after our meeting was finished and attended as "just visitors".

At the invitation that morning, a man and wife stepped forward to submit themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in immersion. During the whole time the preacher spoke to them and the congregation, even as they made their confession of faith, a lady stood in the midst of the congregation. Periodically she clapped, jumped up and down, and shouted for joy as she smiled. It turned out she was the young woman's grandmother.

The whole seen brought to mind my first introduction to California. Maybe it was yours too. I recognized all the Southern California towns as the hometowns of people who appeared on "Contestants Row" of "The Price Is Right" TV game show. (Who among us as kids didn't long to be sick so we could stay home from school and watch Bob Barker at 10 a.m. as we lay on the couch?)

Every weekday, these contestants - who were probably going to lose and not win anything - hoped and prayed to be called to the front. And when their name was chosen... when they were told to "COME ON DOWN!"... they jumped out of their seats like madmen (or women)! They threw all decorum aside as they rushed excitedly - screaming, clapping, jumping - down the aisle, all to the crowd's delight and cheers.

They were called!

So here is something "for your consideration": Can you imagine if Johnny Olsen had called their name... and they sat there?

Sadly, I can.

I see it every week. People called - not by Johnny Olsen or Rod Roddy - but called by God in Christ!

They are called to: repent of sin, to receive forgiveness, to inherit eternal life, to be healed, to gain strength, to testify, and to PRESS ON in faithfulness...

but sit there.

Calmly.

Without "consideration".

Letting the moment pass.

Ignoring the call.

God is calling you, friend. And He doesn't just call on Sunday. And the answer is not just in a commitment; it is in a movement. He doesn't call just a few; He calls us all. And He doesn't call you to see if you might win something. He calls you to come and receive - to assuredly receive.

HEY! YOU! COME ON DOWN!

### **Philippians 3:15-16**

*"Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained."*

If we could only see our spiritual maturity with physical eyes, I'm convinced we'd be a lot more concerned about it! Think about the vanity with which people seek after being taller or prettier... having more hair or less hair... having more eyelashes and less eyebrows... having more muscles and less fat. If we could see our spiritual selves - or if everyone else could see our spiritual selves, I bet we'd be more concerned.

But we can't. And that is the key to all things spiritual. If we could see demons, we'd be more concerned. If we could see angels, we'd be more confident. If we could see God, perhaps we'd all believe. Yet, God has deemed that we must "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). The very definition of that faith is having an assurance of the expectation of God fulfilling His word and a "conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) And, whether we like it or not, without that very faith we cannot even begin to please God. (Hebrews 11:16)

All that to say this: Do you think about life maturely, or is your spiritual maturity "stunted"? Paul says spiritually mature people (v.15) are those who are not thinking about yesterday; they are not thinking about past achievements or even losses; they are pressing toward the goal. (v.14)

Today, picture yourself a spiritual adult. Decide to be a full-grown man (or woman) in regards to your spiritual attitude and keep pressing forward - toward the goal - for the prize - of the upward call of God.

### **Philippians 3:17-18**

*"Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ."*

When I was a kid, there was a guy named Rich Little. Rich Little was a celebrity impersonator. While other comedians made a living acting out characters from a script or making up personas, Rich Little made his living imitating real people. What we don't often think about is that - celebrity or not - every single one of us (most of us to a very great extent) is an impersonator.

Those who pride themselves on "being their own man" are actually only living their lives in close parallel to the way "they've seen it done" - even if subconsciously. Some of us are really very good at it - impersonating our parents first (if not for a lifetime) and then mentors, colleagues, or friends. The question then becomes: "Who am I impersonating?"

Paul invited the Philippians to imitate him and even others who are "following the leader". He said the same to the Corinthians as he said, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Even Paul was imitating someone. For years he had imitated his rabbi, Gamaliel. He forsook all that (vv.4-8) in order to follow the Lord Jesus.

That begs a second question: "Who is following me?" Someone is! I am, and you are, most likely the "pattern" for someone. And if we aren't following Jesus, they are not either.

Let me say that again...

If you are not following Jesus, the people who are following you are not following Jesus.

Does that blow your mind like it does mine? Is that more than just a little scary? Don't be afraid or ashamed to be an imitator, just be sure you are imitating the correct Person!

### **Philippians 3:19-20**

*"Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,"*

It would be easy to look around at the world and say, "Boy! Do we ever know what Paul was talking about there!?" And we certainly do live in a time - evidently like Paul did - where people glory in their shame. Not only do people sin without shame, but some have a whole month of the year that they dedicate to showing their pride over their sin and degradation. Others may display their debauchery on social media. In fact, social media - in many ways - has become the "alter of self" where the god of people's "appetite" (that Paul described as "their belly") for attention and admiration is showcased.

But hold up. Paul isn't talking about "the world" here. While that may certainly all be true about "them" - recheck the context of this verse! Paul has not been talking about his heavenly focus in comparison with "the world", but with people who name Jesus as their Lord!

Back in verse two, he called them "dogs". They were the "Christians" of Jewish decent who desired the Gentile Christians to be like themselves first - then like Jesus. He's talking about religious people - extremely religious people! He's talking about people that would have been part of the Jerusalem congregation - the epicenter of Jesus' work. It wasn't that their extreme religiosity was wrong; their focus was incorrect. Paul sums up his talk here about them and his difference from them. They are focused on religious achievement and law-keeping perfection for their salvation. Paul is focused on growing and enacting a life "worthy of the gospel" (1:27) from his salvation through Jesus. (2:12-13) In the end, he says these kind of "Christians" are actually "enemies of the cross of Christ". Let that sink in, Christian. When we value our work - even our religiosity - over that of Jesus' work, we "walk as enemies of the cross of Christ". We walk in a contrary fashion to Jesus' work. We are actively negating the cross!

Do what God says, yes. Pray without ceasing, yes. Be in Church every Sunday (and whenever else the body meets for encouragement), yes. Look after widows and orphans, yes. Give generously to others and to God's work, yes. Preach the Word in season and out of season, evangelists, yes. Shepherd the flock against the wolves, elders, yes. Serve those in need, deacons, yes. Teach your children when you get up, when you walk along the road, write it on the doorposts of your home, yes. But do it for Jesus sake, not yours.

### **Philippians 3:21-4:1**

*"who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved."*

"Buy the best and you only cry once."

"The last laugh is the best laugh."

"Live like no one else today so you can live like no one else tomorrow."

All these phrases may apply to different things, but they all come from the same philosophy. Don't make decisions about today based on today; make decisions about today based on tomorrow.

Yeah, I know.

"You only live once." (Truth. You do only live once - forever. The question is that of your final residence.)

"Seize the moment." (Could you have any more fleeting philosophy of life?)

"Live for today." (You do know that tomorrow will happen, right?)

I want to enjoy "today" like everyone else. And it's not wrong to enjoy life. When you get to the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon says, basically, "Enjoy the blessings of God." (5:19-20) But enjoying today at the expense of eternity is the temptation! The Hebrew writer told us what today is for:

"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today', that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:13)

It is so easy to get caught up in "today" that over time we are deceived into thinking "today" is all that matters. But the point Paul has been making through his whole letter to the Philippians - live differently, live a life "worthy of the gospel" (1:27), pour out self, be a light, live for others, surrender worldly accolades, "press on toward the goal" (3:14) - has its justification in today's verses: "Jesus is coming in power and will give you real glory."

So what about "today"? How many decisions will you make in the next 86,400 seconds? How many of them will be purely out of concern for today, and how many of them will be eternal decisions? It's a trick question. They are all about eternity. The question is: do you recognize it?

### **Philippians 4:2-3**

*"I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life."*

I was probably eleven years old and living in a small Oklahoma town. All us boys who played sports played on the same traveling football team, but when it came to rec league sports (baseball, soccer, etc.) we were divided. Thankfully, one of the bigger guys on our football team, Onis, was with me on our soccer team. I was a big kid, but he was probably a head taller than me yet! We played side-by-side as defenders most all the season.

One particular day before the game, as we were warming up by taking some kicks on the goal, Onis was approaching the ball with a particular ferocity. I don't know what was in his Cheerios that day, but he was about to kick the air out of the ball! Honestly, in admiration and fun, each time he began to approach the ball, I'd say, "Here comes 'Freight Train Onis!'" For some reason he took exception and after a few times, the freight train was barreling toward me in a tackle. We wrestled about - never really coming to blows - until the coach came and pulled us apart.

"What's wrong with you two?! You're friends and teammates! Act like it!" coach said.

As Paul comes to the end of his letter, he wants to apply some things he's been talking about to a very particular thing happening in the congregation at Philippi. There are two women there at odds with one another. We don't know what they are in a disagreement about, but - once again - Paul uses the phrase "in the Lord". They - both "in the Lord" - are to live in agreement. They may not vote the same. They may not like the same kind of car. One may not like Mexican food, while the other does. Perhaps Euodia didn't like the way Syntyche led the choir. Who knows? But when it comes to matters of faith... when it comes to their witness as members of the body of Jesus... they are to show solidarity and get back to their Kingdom labor and "[strive] side by side for the faith of the gospel." (1:27b)

Occasionally, all of us who labor together allow something to "get our goat". The persistence of a malcontent attitude in our heart causes us to become irritated at perceived injustices, slights, and other such annoyances. Paul instructs that we are to care for one another in the body. God calls us to "get back in line" for the good of the Kingdom and for other parts of the body to help the healing process.

Don't let humanity get in the way of the work of Deity! Agree in the Lord!

### **Philippians 4:4-5**

*"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;"*

"I just love the book of Philippians! ...All that stuff about rejoicing and 'I can do all things'... It's my favorite book."

I hear that a lot.

Somehow people seem to think that the Apostle makes a hard turn here in verse four after addressing a "people problem" (that of course we never have) in verses 2-3.

Not really.

The next several verses all need to be examined in the context of the "people problem" between Euodia and Syntyche. This is not a separate admonition to "be happy". It is a command that goes hand-in-hand with getting along!

Rejoice in the Lord. It is wonderful to be able to have joy - even when we don't see eye-to-eye with a brother or sister on every issue of life. We can still find joy with one another when we recognize our standing in the Lord and obey the command of verse two to "agree in the Lord".

To reiterate that this "rejoicing" is still in the context of getting along, it is paired with this command as well: "let your reasonableness be known to everyone". To be reasonable means that

we do not demand our way on every issue. We don't have to do things "the way we always have". We are not going to insist on every custom and tradition. It is more of the humility which Jesus experienced and we are to imitate as we "count others more significant than [ourselves]". (2:3)

To add a little motivation to the commands, Paul reminds them: "the Lord is at hand". Time is short. It's too short to let our petty problems - or even significant problems relative to this earthly life - hinder or distract us from the mission and the soon return of Jesus.

Are you having trouble finding joy? It's hard to find joy when one part of your body continually slams another in the door jam!

### **Philippians 4:6-7**

*"do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

Years ago there was a song on the radio that singer Aaron Tippin crooned called "There Ain't Nothin' Wrong with the Radio". The gist of it was that the guy in the song had a vehicle that had all kinds of problems and was completely unreliable for anything. In fact, the only good thing he could say about it was that it had a really fantastic radio! In the song, it seems he was fine with that.

Some Christians have lives that are like that.

There "ain't nothin' wrong with the church service" they go to - but the rest of their lives are a shambles. It's great to have a good radio in a car. It's imperative as a believer to go to Church. But just as a car must have work done under the hood that no one sees to be what a car can be, there is work to be done on the inside of the believer that really makes them a reliable follower of Jesus.

That reliability goes beyond how we treat others (see the previous verses of chapter 4), but goes to the heart of the problem. The reason that we get cross-ways with others is usually, truly, not because of what they do - but because of who we are. James puts it this way in his homily to the Church:

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" (4:1)

It is our passions - things we are "uptight" about, good or bad - that cause an anxiety within us. Anxiety is a huge word today. There may be those who suffer a medical reason for anxiety. But far too many rely on drugs for a spiritually-caused anxiety that we all deal with.

Anxiety is literally a tearing within us. The tear occurs when we hold to the promises of God with one hand, and we hold to our worries and fears of our passions with the other. Like a caged

or cornered animal, when we are wounded by our own anxious (torn) hearts - distracted and divided from the hope (expectation) of God's promises - we will unleash our fear in rage with destructive force toward others. To really be able to "rejoice in the Lord" and call a cease-fire, we will have to deal with this anxiety.

Paul says the answer for that is prayer. Prayer gets our eyes back on God. Prayer reminds us of Who God is as we trust Him with all our passions. Peace then comes. It should be understood: Peace is not the absence of conflict! Peace does not necessarily mean a calming of the storm. But what it does mean (literally) is that God will bind our rent heart, putting us back together.

Don't just be content to "have a good radio". Let God put back together your broken, divided, anxious heart.

### **Philippians 4:8-9**

*"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have heard and seen in me - practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."*

Again, I think we traditionally approach this part of the chapter (vv.2-9) in three sections. There's the part about people who need to get along (vv.2-3); there's a nice part about joy and prayer and peace (vv.4-7); and finally, a part about thinking all "sunshine and rainbows" (vv.8-9).

Again, I call "Foul!"

Paul is still talking about having peace. Peace is the subject of the whole passage. And friction between folks in the Church is the problem that needs a peaceful solution. The word "finally" doesn't start a new section (like maybe 3:1), but wraps up this series of verses concerning how to get along with one another! Could it be that what Paul (God through Paul) is asking us to do is think about our brothers and sisters in the light of their good and godly attributes?

Rather than letting our minds lie to us about the thoughts and intentions of someone's heart (something we could never know), could we think thoughts we know are true about them - honorable truths about them? Could we think about the commendable and excellent traits and characteristics they have? Might we do better to focus on things in our brothers and sisters that are worthy of praise? Look, if we knit-pick, the faults that we all have will be exposed and none of us will like anyone! (Just watch the news!)

When we "rejoice in the Lord" (in our commonality of purpose and position, v.4); when we decide to be "reasonable" (flexible and accommodating to others, v.5); when we notice Jesus' presence in our midst (v.5b); when we pray - not just asking for help, but giving thanks (perhaps maybe for that other person or people? v.6) - God promises that He will bind (bring peace) to the division (anxiety) of our hearts and place a guard on our hearts and minds (v.7).

With newly softened and repaired hearts and powerfully enabled minds, we will now find the ability to think about one another - and work together - in peace and harmony. Doesn't that sound fantastic!?

### **Philippians 4:10-11**

*"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content."*

As I write this, it is early on a crisp November morning. The leaves have finished their show of brilliance and are now brown and falling. Daylight savings time has ended, allowing the sun to be up at its correct time - and allowing a long evening. Some don't like the early evening, but I do. It encourages us to knock off work a little earlier than we've been used to all Summer. To me, the long evening is an opportunity for enjoying a warm soup for supper and a fireside chat in the evening. As I imagine this, I picture a feeling... contentment.

But note here that Paul doesn't say he is only content on picturesque "Southern Nights" - nor is he saying that he needs something - but that he has learned to be content "in whatever situation".

That's tough. Sometimes the "situation" can trigger that inner discontent already in our hearts and tempt us to grumble (see 2:14).

It would be hard to be content if it was fifty degrees, rainy, and I was soaked and without gear in the outdoors. It would be hard to be content if I was without my mate of over thirty years - even for an evening or two. It would be hard to be content if I was ill and unable to do anything about my sickness. It would be hard to be content if I was suffering a grave injustice at work. It would be hard to be content if there was "too much month at the end of the money". In reality, we can always find a reason not to be content - even when we have far more than we actually need.

Yet, Paul is proof that we can learn to be content! (More on that next week!) In fact, listen to what he told the Evangelist at Ephesus, his protegee, Timothy:

"But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content." (1 Timothy 6:8)

We can learn to be content - even if we have very little. We can learn to be content even if we have but the very basics of survival - food and clothing. As a matter of fact, if we were to study sociology, anthropology, etc [all those "ologies" about how people live(d)], I would guess that we'd find that the more we have the less content we become!

Are you willing to learn to be content? Or is the "drive for more" your motivation in life? Paul has already told us that "knowing Christ Jesus [as] Lord" is of "surpassing worth" compared with the most venerated of life's achievements.

Can you... will you... learn to be content?

### Philippians 4:12-13

*"I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me."*

Have you ever been let in on a secret? Perhaps it was in an initiation into a club. That's the language Paul uses here in verse 12.

There is a "secret society", if you will, of people who know how to be content. There is a select and exclusive group of people who have this supernatural ability. Whether they are in grave need or in the lap of luxury - they are "OK" with it. (And, by the way, there is as large or larger a percentage of people who live luxurious lifestyles in discontent as are living in abject poverty!) The exciting truth of this, however, is that while the club is exclusive, membership is open!

Paul describes how he came to learn the secret throughout this letter and others. He told the Corinthians:

"Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."  
(2 Corinthians 11:26-28)

The first part of his tutorial - or initiation - was stress. This stress came in the form of undeserved punishments, insecurity, and downright torture. There was also the stress of work anxiety (something it seems we are all trying to avoid or medicate against).\*

"But wait! I have stress! I have felt undeservedly persecuted. I live with insecurity. And while I haven't been tortured, I feel a lot of anxiety! Why do I struggle to be content?" Because the other part of learning contentment is experiencing Jesus in the midst of the struggle. You can read Paul's words, (most aptly translated by the NIV, surprisingly):

"I can do all this [live with a little or a lot - not "all things", as other versions say] through Him who gives me strength."

But unless you actually lean on Jesus daily... unless you actually die to self every day (Luke 9:23)... you will never learn the secret. Contentment cannot be "learned" by the enlightenment of the mind, but only through the experience of the risen Christ governing our lives, moment by moment. Many people like to claim Philippians 4:13 as a "promise", but reveal its ineffectiveness in their lives by showing a lack of contentment.

After having much, then losing most all of it, but holding to God in the midst of it, Job said:

"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."  
(Job 42:5)

Does your discontent belie the fact that you are not living with Jesus moment by moment. Facts, ideas, and philosophies of Christianity can be taught. But they never take effect on us until we live it!

[\*Please understand that there may be a physical cause for anxiety that needs be treated by medicines under a doctor's care. I am not denying that, but simply stating that many are trying to medicate a spiritual problem.]

### **Philippians 4:14-15**

*"Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only."*

There is something divine in partnership. In Genesis 1, God - in His triune nature - said, "Let us make man in Our image..." (1:26, italics mine). After God made Adam, God revealed His ultimate design by creating for Adam, a partner. Throughout the scriptures, there are few "Lone Rangers". God's people generally do God's work in a partnership.

Everyone needs a partner.

It is a symbiotic relationship designed by God for the body of Christ. Paul reveals this important concept that we see alluded to elsewhere in the New Testament and played out before us in the book of Acts. It is the partnership of giving and receiving. Each received and each gave.

Paul gave instruction, divine knowledge, accountability, exhortation, and a host of many other apostolic gifts to God's Church. He gave through his letter writing, his preaching, and even his suffering on behalf of the Church that they might know Jesus.

The Churches saw to his needs physically, sent him needed money, and forwarded study materials. They gave fellowship, encouragement, and all the things necessary to keep Paul going from congregation to congregation - or even bless him during his prison stay.

What about you though? The whole body of Christ is to be functioning as receivers and givers! We are to receive so that we can give, and we give so that we can receive. When someone doesn't do their part as a partner - the partnership fails,... and so does the mission.

### **Philippians 4:16-17**

*"Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit."*

Every year, at certain times of the year, there are people to whom I give gifts. It's not that they necessarily need anything. They haven't called and said, "I need shoes." None of these people sent a text saying, "We are struggling; could you bring groceries." I try to do that kind of giving when I can and where it is warranted as well. But often people who are receivers, may not need a gift.

And that's OK.

Paul will go on to say that he's not telling them this to "guilt them" into giving more. He simply wants them to know that they've blessed him and what blessings they will receive! Paul declares that Jesus spoke truth (imagine that!) when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:25) As twentieth century Evangelist Brother Fred Huckelbury was fond of saying, "Don't ever steal someone's blessing!" The Philippians would be blessed in giving more than Paul would be blessed in receiving. If he didn't need what they sent currently, he could find use for it in his ministry - or pass it on and allow himself the blessing of giving!

What about you? There are plenty of ways to partner with the body of Christ in giving and receiving today. Many will desire the blessing of receiving - but remember, we are to be content whether we receive or not. The greatest fruit born of the partnership is on the giving end!

### **Philippians 4:18-20**

*"I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."*

When I was growing up, I loved Christmas. Yeah, there was family. Always, there was good food. I liked the Charlie Brown Christmas special on TV, and the decorations were fun. And it was a celebration of Jesus' birth "and all that". But as a child, what I really liked were the presents!

Growing older, I then had the opportunity to not only receive, but to give. I remember asking my parents what they'd like for Christmas. They'd always say, "You don't need to get us anything. Spend your money on other people." As a person who still liked presents... I didn't get that!

However, now having children of my own, I understand it. It takes a certain amount of humility to receive a gift from your child. You will love it - no matter what it is, but we know that, generally, our children have less resources than we. We can buy practically anything they'd give us, but they sacrificed to show their love.

In a sense, Paul was a father. He was a spiritual father - or grandfather - to all the Philippians! He served God in such a way as to be content with whatever and however God provided. As he tells them, he doesn't need anymore gifts. But what he does point out is this - their gifts to him are mainly an offering to God! Their gifts, whatever they are, become a sacrifice that pleases God.

We can't offer any service to God that He cannot do Himself. We cannot give Him any gift that the One Who owns the cattle on a thousand hills doesn't already have. But what we can do is partner in giving to others. This is a gift God would love for you to give Him.

### **Philippians 4:21-22**

*"Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household."*

Most, if not all of us, have a political opinion. You may be very passionate about politics - or not. But you probably have some opinion about certain social issues, and what politician might best carry out those issues to the end you prefer.

Some of us are better than others about refraining from political opinion at family gatherings. Some try hard to insert social politics into the Church - while others having a scriptural viewpoint on certain policies try to speak to sins (both of commission and omission) without injecting a candidate or party into the discussion.

But here is my point: There is probably some politician that you would have a hard time saying something good about. (If you feel kindly toward them all, good for you!) But let's point to someone like Hitler. Most of us could agree upon his evil and nefarious intentions and beliefs. But pick any one you "don't like" - present, past, or Hitler himself. How would you feel about someone who was a Christian who lived in the house of that politician either as a family member, staff member, or servant? Would you find it difficult to fellowship with them? Would you question their sincerity toward Jesus and His Church? Would you even acknowledge them as brothers or sisters in the Lord?

As Paul closes his letter, did you notice that those who were "especially" eager to "greet" the Philippians were some of Caesar's household?

There were some Caesars that were better than others. There were some more tolerant of Christianity than others. There were some who were more moral or immoral than others. But not the one during Paul's writing to the Philippians. That Caesar was Nero. Besides being a great persecutor of Christians, Nero's immorality is so blasphemous and infamously debaucherous that I won't write any of it here for fear of children reading this! You can look it up for yourself.

What would you think of a Christian in Nero's household who sent you "greetings"? ("Hey honey! We got a Christmas card from Nero's house!")

But look; let us be careful about judging the Christian walk of others because of their influences or associations. I'd say I'm certainly guilty of looking with a skeptical eye at those who may not hold some of my most endeared and passionately held political beliefs - or who even have such close associations to the of a different point of view or lifestyle.

Behold the power of the gospel!

That Word that has the ability to divide "soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow" is that which can "[discern] the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) Don't we desire the influence of the Word and of Christians in those places and among those people?

Pray for people in such places - those already there and those who might by God's grace enter! Encourage people into such places! And be a light into some dark corners yourself! You never know who might end up sending "greetings!" back to Christ's Body!

### **Philippians 4:23**

*"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."*

I want to thank you for taking the time to journey with me through the book of Philippians. This devotional was born out of a five part series of revival meeting sermons I preached across the United States throughout 2023. Through the year, Philippians became more and more of an encouragement. It became more and more of a conviction. And it became more and more of a challenge.

We've seen things for which to be thankful, and things of which we should repent. There are things to live up to and be worthy of, and there are things in which to rejoice.

All of it takes grace.

The truth is that while those in Christ (a phrase Paul used constantly through this letter) have been sanctified by His sacrifice... have been justified by The Judge... have been empowered by His essence... our humanity keeps getting in the way. We've not yet perfected this "walking with Jesus". That's why we need grace. We didn't "get here" without it, and we will not get to heaven without it either! (Galatians 3:3)

So Paul's final prayer for the Philippians is my prayer for you, oh Reader. That you will not only find the grace that Jesus will so freely give to move you from weak to worthy - but that will take you from that take-off to the "terminal".

If you have not yet experienced that grace, please take time to read the following summation of how you find that saving grace in Jesus. If you need someone where you live to help you begin this journey, please contact our staff at: [rocksolidministries.org](http://rocksolidministries.org).

*"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."*

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## **How to Find the Grace of God for Your Life**

Believe that Jesus is the Son of the Living God and decide to entrust Him with your life. (Mark 16:16)

Confess that belief (to yourself, to God, and to others - now and forever) and confess your need for help because of your rebellion against God. (The Bible word for that rebellion "sin".) (Matthew 10:32)

Turn from your old life. Let your change of mind - your decision and trust in Jesus - cause you to quit seeking your own agenda for your life, end your rebellion against God's direction, and follow Him. (The Bible word for that turn-around is "repentance".) (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38)

Be immersed (fully dunked) in water by another Christian. This is not sprinkled with water or to have water poured on you. This is not something you do or have done to you as an unknowing child. This is the when and where of: "putting on Christ" (so that we are "in Jesus Christ") (Galatians 3:27), our sins being forgiven (Acts 2:38) as they are "washed away" (Acts 22:16), and the Holy Spirit enabling and empowering us to live a life of Christ-likeness. (Acts 2:38)

Live faithfully by continuing in the study of the Bible, being united in a New Testament believing and practicing congregation, and participating in the mission that God has for your life! (Matthew 24:13)