



GOSPEL
partnership

DEVOTIONALS 5

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

¹² 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, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

DAY 1

PHILIPPIANS 2:12

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,

Work out your own salvation. As someone said in our prayer meeting this past week when we prayed through this scripture, “That doesn’t sound very Christian!” The very idea of salvation means to be rescued, so this verse can’t mean that we need to work at saving ourselves. Jesus is the one who saves us. This verse isn’t telling us to work *for* our salvation but to work it *out*.

When your mind wanders, what bubbles up? What do you think about? Is it a difficult relationship? Guilt over sin? An exciting project? A homework assignment? Health challenges? Your kids or grandkids? Favorite pastimes? Disappointments?

Now, think about those things in the context of working out your salvation. In other words, work the truth of your salvation into that situation. Like kneading yeast into dough, work your salvation in. We can face a difficult relationship knowing that the presence of Christ gives us the ability to love as we have been loved. This doesn’t mean ignoring the difficulties, but kneading our security in Christ and his love into that relationship. So too with guilt or regret. We can be forgiven and that is what defines us, not our sin. An exciting project becomes a way to use the gifts God has given us. We work out the implications of our salvation.

We do this *with fear and trembling*. The *Reformation Study Bible* says that “this is awe and reverence rather than panic and alarm. The right emotions are stirred by the presence of God.” Our salvation was costly for Jesus, so we don’t want to flippantly receive it. We treasure it and its power in our real lives. *Fear and trembling* seem the perfect words to describe that process. But even so, let’s note that our verse starts with “therefore,” which links back to Jesus and his humility and love. He’s going to stick with us and he’s proven it.

So in our cars on the way to work, thinking about the tasks/stress/monotony that awaits. At 5 o’clock when our kids are hungry and tired and bedtime can’t come soon enough. As we face a night without plans and the loneliness sets in. When we can’t sleep thinking about the people we worry about or the people that make us mad. We work out our salvation with awe and reverence because we know a God who won’t let us go. Without him we walk in darkness, but with him we have seen a great light.

PRAYER

Here's a song to use as a prayer:

Abide by Liz Vice

Once darkness was our guide
Without hope and only night
We heard the call and turned to you
Now the veil has been removed

Jesus, we will throw away our lives to follow you
Struggling in your strength, resting in your truth
Jesus, you're so beautiful, you give vision to the blind
You in us, the hope of glory, in you we will abide

Though the body waste away
Inside we're renewed, as you remain
The hope of glory far outweighs
The light affliction of our days

With hope for tomorrow, we fight through today
With energy, you powerfully work
We lift our hands and say
The mystery is known
Jesus, you're on the throne
Darkness is overthrown
Help us to make you known

--Linda Bokma-deJong and Susan Guerra

DAY 2

PHILIPPIANS 2:13

“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Paul moves quickly from giving the Philippians a call to work out their collective spiritual health with an eye toward their future glory to reminding them of God's work in their lives. The tension between verses 12 and 13 raises the question, *Whose work matters?* At first pass, that question seems a bit silly. It's a real challenge to understand what Paul is getting at here. Yes, it's true that we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, but we're also to remember that God is the one who works in us.

In *Basics for Believers*, Don Carson says, “God himself is working in us both to will and to act: he works in us at the level of our wills and at the level of our doing.” God works *in* us not merely *with* us.

This is a real theological study here. Yet it's a wonderful example of why theology matters and why it's important to discuss, parse, and work out the application for our lives together. Paul's use of the word *for* indicates that among the congregation in Philippi there was an energizing force that was no less than God himself. The direction of work is important to understand—God works and has worked; man must and can work.

And this work comes to the Christians in Philippi to effect a change in their wills and in turn a change in their conduct. This will result in the harmony that Paul is striving for in the Philippian believers and, of course, in you and me today.

The true beauty of this passage is that God's work is for his good pleasure, which is for our benefit and enjoyment. Yet all this is made possible for you and me through the life, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the name above every name. Now, through this reality, we are offered a real chance to grow through the work of God in our lives, who is well-pleased, and through our responsive work toward harmony. That means today that we can submit and hold fast to the Word of God (2:16), which gives us access to God the Father and from which through the Holy Spirit we can see real change.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, through the work of Jesus Christ, your Son, we have been made righteous before you. This means we don't have to earn our standing before you. Nor does it mean that we work with you to earn salvation. It is a free gift of grace flowing from your steadfast love and mercy. Give us eyes to see our status as children of God and the delight it is to be found in you. We pray this in our savior Jesus's name. Amen.

-Addison Hawkins

DAY 3

PHILIPPIANS 2:14

Do all things without grumbling or disputing,

Grumbling and complaining are part of our human nature. We see that early on in scripture. In Genesis 3, Eve complained that the serpent persuaded her that God really didn't mean what he said when he prohibited the first couple from eating fruit from a tree that would open their eyes to good and evil. The Israelites started complaining within days of being liberated from Egypt. Later, they ended up being stuck in the desert, at least in part because they thought the people of Canaan were "taller and more powerful." After the nation of Israel was established, the people complained that they didn't have a king like the other nations around them. Jonah complained that God cared for the people of Nineveh and was willing to forgive them if they repented. It is clear that Paul takes his instructions for the church from the narratives of the peoples of Israel.

Grumbling here refers to whispering complaints, muttering, murmuring, or talking in secret against someone and making negative comments about others behind their backs. The word was used to describe the cooing of doves. *Disputing*, or arguing, in this context means quarreling and debating in ways that are disruptive, divisive, and raise doubts. While the discussions in the Philippian church hadn't gotten to the point of open conflict, they were headed that way.

We don't know exactly what was causing the grumbling. It could have been that the Philippians were suffering and having a hard time dealing with it. The complaining also could have happened because the people didn't like something that the leadership was doing. Whatever the cause, we know that the results of the grumbling and arguing worked against the unity of the church. Paul was focused on God's purpose in spreading the gospel. Conversations that distracted from that purpose needed to be curtailed in order for the church to fully carry out its mission.

We all know how easy it is to slip into a complaining mode of thinking. We have opinions, and we naturally want to express them, and it's human nature to prefer things be done our way. Paul's instructions can help us to think about how we express our opinions. Are we being constructive? Are we being disruptive to a process that is already taking place? Are we making comments that are hurtful? Is the primary mission of the church at the center of our thoughts the way it was with Paul? How much do we value the unity of the church?

The people of Israel had a long history of complaining. With God's help, as his people in the church in Grand Rapids, we can do our best to create a different kind of history at Christ Church.

PRAYER

Lord, Paul's words are clear and direct. Our words can hurt the unity of the church and the effectiveness of our mission to convey the gospel in more ways than we know. Help us to control our tongues and always bear in mind the central purposes of Christ Church and how we as a unified body accomplish them.

-Richard Malone

DAY 4

PHILIPPIANS 2:15-16

¹⁵ “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, ¹⁶ 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.”.

Paul uses athletic imagery frequently in his writing (Acts 13:25; 20:24; Rom. 9:16; 1 Cor. 9:24-26; Gal. 2:2; 5:7; Phil. 3:14; 2 Thess. 3:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:7). Athletic contests and festivals were commonplace in the cities where Paul ministered. It is very possible that Paul even plied his trade, making tents, for athletes who had traveled to events in the cities where he was living. His readers would have been familiar with these contests in much the same way that football Saturdays create a festive atmosphere in college towns today. No doubt, athletes would have been seen training for their events on a daily basis. In addition, every city had a gymnasium where athletes trained.

Athletic victory was even more highly prized in Paul's day than it is in ours. They were not awarded for just participating. In many cases, to lose was a disgrace. If an athlete withdrew from a race without sufficient reason, he could be whipped. In the Greco-Roman world, athletics were approached with vigor and passion. This explains why Paul uses the athletic metaphor in Philippians 3:14 and helps to explain why he applied this imagery to the Christian life.

Those that win athletic contests normally are the ones that give their all. They fully commit themselves to doing whatever it takes to get to the finish line first. They prepare and train whether or not they feel like it. They build strength and endurance on top of their natural gifts. They plan. They understand where they are in regard to the competition. They understand how the physical, emotional, and mental elements of the sport work together. When they compete, they are completely focused on getting to the finish line.

So Paul's prayer in Philippians 3:14 is that he would not be like an athlete who loses, whose efforts were in vain. The greatest prize in life for him was to know that through him others had come to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ. The gospel laid out the racecourse for Paul, and he was determined to win the race and, like a coach, bring along his followers with him. May God help us to persistently instill a similar attitude in our discipleship.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the example of Paul's clear focus on the centrality of Christ in his life. Forgive us for the ways we let ourselves be distracted from that same kind of focus. Help us by your Spirit to prepare and train better as believers in Christ and grow in our ability to focus on the finish line.

-Richard Malone

DAY 5

PHILIPPIANS 2:17-18

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

One of the themes in Paul's letters is to picture the Christian life in terms of a new priesthood with new sacrifices. As we read in Romans 12:1, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Paul is concerned that we view our lives as living sacrifices. Unlike those in the Old Testament, these sacrifices are not for the purpose of purification or the forgiveness of sin, because this has already been given to us through the work of Christ. Instead, we offer new living sacrifices through our good works so that we can "shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15). Paul sees the work the Philippians have done and he rejoices in it, even if he is poured out like a drink offering.

In the Old Testament, the drink offering was an offering of wine which was usually poured over the other sacrifices that were being offered. "And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the Lord with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin" (Leviticus 23:13).

It was also a sacrifice that was only offered after Israel entered into the promised land, and it represented the bounty that God provided for Israel. Paul's reference to the drink offering is symbolic of his death, which will be poured over the sacrificial works of those that he has ministered to. He uses this metaphor again in 2 Timothy 4:6: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come."

So, what do we take away from this? First, we should be glad for those that have guided us in our Christian walk through the sacrifice of their own good works and life. Second, we should rejoice that we can participate in the work of Christ through the offering of our lives as a living sacrifice. We rejoice because we are being shaped in the image of Jesus.

PRAYER

Psalm 5

¹ Give ear to my words, O Lord;
consider my groaning.

² Give attention to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you do I pray.

³ O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.

⁴ For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil may not dwell with you.

⁵ The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.

⁶ You destroy those who speak lies;
the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

⁷ But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house.

I will bow down toward your holy temple
in the fear of you.

⁸ Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.

⁹ For there is no truth in their mouth;
their inmost self is destruction;
their throat is an open grave;
they flatter with their tongue.

¹⁰ Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.

¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may exult in you.

¹² For you bless the righteous, O Lord;
you cover him with favor as with a shield.