

Faithful to Finish

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Date: 08 January 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Philippians chapter 1, verse 1, and Josh is going to read down through verse number 11. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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. 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. 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. 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. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we are so grateful to have your word and we're so humbled that you have been so kind to preserve it for us. Would you please help us now as we open your word and look into it? We want to be learners of the things that you have to say to us by your spirit, through your word. We want to be believers in the things that you would have us to take into our hearts and hold on to. And we want to be obedient to the things that you show us. So please make us that kind of people. Please have your spirit do work in our hearts right now for the glory of Jesus

Christ, we pray. Amen. Do you ever start something and then not finish it? Maybe some of you have a big thick novel that's sitting somewhere on a bookshelf that you started at one point and then maybe it got a little boring and so you abandoned it. Maybe you have a bedroom, like a spare bedroom project that needs just a little bit of paint or just some trim work, but it just hasn't been finished. Maybe a garage that needs to be insulated. Very important this time of year, right? Kids, I wonder if you ever start building like a Lego set and then maybe partway through the Lego set, you know, you're following the instructions in the little booklet, then you just decide, forget it. I'm just going to play with my Lego and I'm not going to put together this whole set. Maybe more families than just mine has a puzzle that has been ignored. And then finally, after sitting on the floor for too long, it just gets put away. And you're like, well, we're never going to finish that. So just put it away. Maybe you have an entrepreneurial kind of mind and you can think about lots of great business ideas, but maybe like me, you lack some follow through to execute on those ideas, to actually see them through to completion.

Lois and I made plans to start a business once. And this business was called Toilet Patrol. And here's what this business was. We were only going to clean the bathrooms at restaurants and stores and so on, because I am so frustrated when bathrooms are so filthy and disgusting, but I get it. Like no employees are being paid to clean bathrooms. They don't want to clean the bathrooms. So they do a poor job. And then the bathrooms are disgusting.

So this was our business plan was to create this Toilet Patrol business. And I found this business plan that Lois and I made. I had scanned it. And when I say plan, like we have employees that we're planning to hire, what policies we're going to have to develop, and what kind of cleaning supplies we're going to need. We even have some pretty clever slogans here. If your pot is in the pit, swirl until you smile. Are you kidding me? You put that on a t-shirt, right? That's a moneymaker. Okay. This is as far as this business went. It never took off.

It never took off. It never got any further than this plan, although it is a two-page plan, on paper. That's as far as our plan got. Humans are made in God's image. And that means there are several wonderful ways that we can, as followers of Jesus, increasingly be like God.

[5 : 17] But unlike you and me, God always finishes what he starts. If God gave you life, if by the power of the Holy Spirit, you have been born again, you have been regenerated, then God will see to it that he will also finish that work that he began in you. It might take a long time. But when Jesus returns, God has promised to finish that work that he started. God always is faithful to finish what he starts.

This is the theme of this first paragraph of Paul's letter to the Philippians, and I believe it's what the Holy Spirit desires Steadfast Church to remember from this text. We must remember that God is always faithful to finish what he starts. And so, for followers of Jesus like us, an appropriate response to God's faithfulness is what? We should be thankful for the progress that God has made in our lives, and we should also be hopeful for the perfection that will one day be ours when Jesus returns.

In AD 51, in response to a vision, Paul and his ministry team travel to Macedonia. And Macedonia is located in the northern part of what is now Greece. You can read about this in Acts chapter 16. This might make a good exercise at some mealtime this week. You can go back and look at Acts chapter 16, moms and dads. Paul and his friends stay for several days in Philippi, and Philippi is Macedonia's leading city. And that's where we get this book, Philippians. You can just look at the very beginning, right? It's written to a church at the city in Philippi. So, Paul and his friends stay for several days. One Saturday, they meet what must have been a beautiful, God-fearing woman because her name was

Lydia. God saves Lydia and others in her household, and Lydia is baptized, and it seems as though she may have welcomed the church at Philippi to worship Jesus in her home. This is the group of people to whom Paul writes the letter of Philippians. I wonder if you noticed, as Josh read to us, the warmth of Paul's relationship with this church. Paul really loves them. He calls them saints, holy people. Isn't that nice?

What if someone came to you and said, you are such a holy person? Paul calls them saints, holy people. And he greets them with this blessing of both grace and peace.

[8 : 36] Now, sometimes, I know we've all done this, right? Sometimes when you write an email, you might say, Dear so-and-so, I hope you're well. We don't really mean that. It's just sort of filler words that we put in there, right? I hope you're well. When Paul says grace and peace, he means it. And we know that he means it because he anchors this grace and peace in the Father, God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace are not filler words for Paul. Look again at verse number one. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and the deacons. We might use the word elders there, elders and deacons. Your Bible might also say bishops and deacons. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I want you to notice this as we continue reading because Paul is going to confirm his deep love for these people by using several all-inclusive words. As we continue reading, see if you notice the word every and always and all. Look at verse three.

I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer.

Does this seem a little hard to believe? It's okay to be honest, church. We have all experienced in one measure or another some church hurt.

In my notes next to verse number four, I wrote, for real, and then question mark, exclamation point, question mark. Every prayer for all of you, always.

[11 : 03] Late in Acts chapter 16, in Philippi, Paul and one of his ministry partners, Silas, are beaten.

And then they are thrown into jail, and then their feet are put in stocks. In other words, the pieces of wood were clamped down on their feet.

They were very uncomfortable. And at midnight, the Bible records that Paul and Silas are worshipping God. And there's an earthquake, and their prison cells are open, and they are freed, but they don't run away.

Do you remember the outcome of that? There's a jailer. We sometimes refer to him as the Philippian jailer.

And he's about ready to kill himself, because he believes that all of his prisoners have been lost. And he's hopeless. But he sees something in Paul and Silas, and undoubtedly he saw something in the way that they endured the beating, in the way that now they're singing in the middle of the night, despite being horribly uncomfortable and all beaten up.

[12 : 20] And this Philippian jailer says to Paul, what do I need to do to be saved? And Paul records in Acts 16 a verse, maybe some of us even have memorized this verse since we were kids, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

In all likelihood, this jailer who beat Paul, threw him in jail, in stocks, made him uncomfortable in the middle of the night, this jailer is in all likelihood part of this church.

And Paul says, I pray for all of you, all the time, in every one of my prayers. Undoubtedly, these words reflect Paul's graciousness, but I don't think Paul is using hyperbole here.

He is not flattering them. He genuinely loves them, and he joyfully prays for all of them, all the time. I wonder, who are you having a hard time loving?

Who are you having a hard time forgiving? Who could you pray for this week? As the Holy Spirit continues to heal our hearts, I pray that we can follow Paul's example, and pray for all of those in other churches, even those who may have hurt us.

[13 : 58] Why does Paul pray this way for the Philippians? Well, verse 5 tells us. Look in your Bible if you have it, otherwise it'll be on the screen.

Verse 5. Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. The Philippians' enthusiasm for the gospel is matched by active participation in gospel ministry.

You might say, they put their money where their mouth was, right? They didn't just say they were very excited about the gospel. They didn't just send Paul on his way with thoughts and prayers.

They actually opened up their pocketbooks and their bank accounts, whatever that would have looked like for them, and they gave money to Paul to further the gospel ministry that he was embarking on.

No wonder Paul loves them. Not because of the money, but because their faith is real, authentic, sincere, genuine faith.

[15 : 14] How do we know this? How do we know that their faith is sincere? Do you remember Paul's words from Romans chapter 8?

They're fairly well known. Paul says, I am sure that neither death nor life, and he carries on with these phrases, can separate us from the love of God.

Remember that phrase, I am sure? Did you notice that here? It's the same phrase. Look at verse number 6. Same Greek word.

I am sure of this. that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.

God is faithful to finish what he starts. God's work in the Philippians cannot and will not be thwarted.

[16 : 13] Paul is totally convinced of this. He is sure, and we can be sure as well. child of God, you did not start the work of redemption in your heart.

God did. God started the work of redemption, and since he started that work of redemption, you can be sure that God will be faithful to finish it.

God will never give you up. God will never let you down. He will never desert you. God will continue to make you more and more and more like your Savior, Jesus.

What does that mean for us? We can be thankful for progress and hopeful for perfection. And let's not overlook this.

Paul's assurance, Paul's ability, his willingness to say, I am sure, is not based on some type of insider information that Paul has about them.

[17 : 25] He doesn't have some kind of x-ray vision where he can look into their hearts and know that they have truly been born again. Paul's confidence in the authenticity of their faith is because their faith is evidenced by their works.

Their faith is proven by their partnership with Paul. What kind of partnership? Well, Paul tells us it's partnership through ups and downs.

Through good and bad. You might even say that these Philippians are steadfast and immovable. Do you remember that from last week?

They're committed. They're all in. Look at verse 7. Indeed, it is right for me to think this way about all of you because I have you in my heart and you are all partners with me in grace.

Boy, I love that phrase. Partners with me in grace. Both. Hear it. Both in my imprisonment when times are hard, when times are tough, when we wonder if God is really with us and really for us and if the work that we have been doing is all in vain, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

[19 : 03] When times are going really good and I'm having the freedom and the privilege of sharing the gospel. In both of those times, you have been partners with me, Paul says.

That's how I know. That's how I can be sure that God who began this work will be faithful to finish it. The evidence is in your commitment to the gospel.

In other words, we might say your perseverance in faith. When we express love for someone, we might say, I love you, what?

from the bottom of my heart. You hear that? Girls, you like the way that sounds? Men, we like the way that sounds too, don't we?

I love you from the bottom of my heart. Paul does something similar here. He, look in your Bible and see if you can spot this, this affection of Jesus.

[20 : 13] It's in verse 8. Do you see it? God is my witness. Did I read this verse? God is my witness how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

This is what Paul is doing here. It's like he would say, from the bottom of my heart, except that's not how they said it. Do you know how they said it back then? It would sound like this, from the depths of my bowels.

It's a funny little word in the original Greek language. I don't know very much Greek, but it's worth teaching you because it's a fun little word to say. It's this word, splonknon.

You want it? You want to say it? Splonknon. It means your bowels. Okay? You tell your mom later, I love you from my splonknon.

From the very depths of my heart. Okay? Paul does something similar here. He says, I want you to know, this is the most expressive Greek word he could choose.

[21 : 25] And did you notice? It's not only that he says from the depths, from the depths of his bowels, deep down in who he is, but he connects it to Christ Jesus.

The affection, the love that God has given him for these Philippians. That's what he says. It's all of the affection, all of the love, deep down inside of me, for you.

I miss all of you with that love. That kind of affection. Paul really loves this church.

Look at how he prays for them in verse 9. And I pray this, that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment Paul wants the Holy Spirit to produce love inside of the Philippians.

Love in knowledge and discernment. love without knowledge and without discernment can become very wishy-washy.

[22 : 57] We can become flip-floppers. We can be blown around by all kinds of crazy ideas that come our way. But conversely, knowledge without love, Paul teaches us clearly about this in 1 Corinthians 13 as well, doesn't he?

If you're going to have knowledge without love, you might as well just take a drumstick and play a solo on the cymbal. Nobody wants that. Nobody is showing up to hear you play a solo on the cymbal.

How annoying. You would run away. Paul has no interest in knowledge that does not lead to greater love for God and others and he simultaneously has no desire for love that is superficial and disconnected from what God says is good and true and right.

What an interesting weaving this is or maybe an interesting braid if I could use that word. Love and knowledge and discernment and Paul says these need to, did you see it in your Bible, keep on growing.

They need to keep on growing. He uses here, if you like to study the Bible and you're into making these kind of connections, he uses the same word here as he used in 1 Corinthians 15, 58 that we saw last week.

[24 : 38] Remember where it said always excelling, always abounding in the work of the Lord? Same word here when he says keep on growing. Our love our knowledge, our discernment, these things that need to be braided together and continuing to grow among us, they're like the leftovers when Jesus feeds the massive crowd of people.

Always excelling, always abounding. There's always more room for us to continue growing in love and knowledge and discernment.

I wonder where do you need the Holy Spirit to work this up in your heart this week? Maybe you need more love.

Maybe you need to grow in knowing God more and need to spend more time in his word thinking about him, meditating on him. Maybe you need more discernment.

I'm so humbled by God's grace to us, friends. We can be thankful for progress and hopeful for perfection.

[25 : 55] As God gives his people love that keeps on growing in knowledge and discernment, what can we expect? What should we expect will happen?

First, careful thinking and sound decision-making. Second, growing godliness and third, God will get so much glory from among us.

Look at verse number 10. Do you see that phrase so that there? So Paul wants the Holy Spirit to produce love that keeps on growing in knowledge and discernment and then this so that tells us what's the point?

What's the point of the love and the knowledge and the discernment that keep on growing so that verse number 10, you may approve the things that are superior.

Approve the things that are superior. Wisdom, discernment, careful thinking, sound decision-making and number two, you may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ.

[27 : 03] a growing godliness in our hearts, more and more Christ-likeness in our hearts, more of Christ's humility, more of his compassion, more of his gentleness, more of his boldness, more of his care for the hurting and the outcasts.

Filled, verse 11, with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. Here it is, number three, to the glory and praise of God.

Wouldn't it be great if you could just snap your fingers and be like Jesus? Wouldn't it be great if you could snap your fingers and I would be more like Jesus?

Amen. And maybe your spouse or maybe your friend or maybe that person that you are having a hard time loving and forgiving. Wouldn't it be great to just snap our fingers and immediately be like Jesus?

Immediate godliness sounds amazing, doesn't it? But God chooses to grow us slowly. and oftentimes through suffering and trial and hardships.

[28 : 30] So, that means while we can be thankful for the progress, we can also be patient. Patient when it seems like we are growing more slowly than we'd like.

And not only patient with ourselves, but also patient and gracious and gentle with one another. we should recognize that the pace at which God may be growing another's godliness may be different from the pace at which God is growing my godliness.

That's God's business. Let's be patient and gracious and gentle with one another as we continue to make the progress that the Holy Spirit is doing in our hearts.

God knows what he is doing and he will be faithful to finish what he starts. And we can still be hopeful for the day when Jesus redeems all of our suffering, when he rebukes every evil, when he enforces justice in his eternal kingdom, and he makes us perfect like he is.

Will you be there? Will you be there when Jesus makes all things new? Are you part of the family of God? Have you received the forgiveness of your sins purchased by the blood of Jesus on the cross?

[30 : 05] Are you trusting in Jesus as your only hope for perfection? Come to Jesus. God promises he will begin a work in you and he will carry it on to completion.

He is faithful to finish. So we can be thankful for progress and hopeful for perfection. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the good work that you have begun in many of our hearts.

We are grateful for the progress that you have made and we recognize that there is more room to continue growing.

Would you please continue to do this kind of work, Holy Spirit, supernatural, miraculous work, in our hearts?

Father, some people here, especially some of the dear children, need to be saved today. Would you please begin a work in them by the power of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the gospel, overcome their stubborn unbelief and draw them to faith in Jesus so that they respond by believing this gospel with a childlike faith?

[31 : 43] Oh, Father, please begin a work in some lost souls today. And we are confident that you will carry it out, carry it on to completion, both in their hearts and in ours.

Father, we're grateful for your word. Help us to to understand and to believe and to obey the things that we have heard.

Give us your Holy Spirit so that we are even more and more and more like Jesus. Help us, we pray, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.