

Philippians

Day 1: God finishes what He starts
Phil 1:1-26

As we begin this week, I want you to focus on what God is doing in your season of life right now. How is He growing you and shaping you? What kind of person is He calling you to be? God has a plan for each of our lives. He has given you passions and desires to accomplish great things. Great things for His kingdom. He has done the work of salvation in your life, and will continue to form you into the person He made you to be. How are you going to respond to that? Will you lean into it? Will you fight it?

Philippians is a very practical book and gives us a solid example of how we should respond to God as His followers. Paul shows us how to live, and who to model ourselves after, but before we dive into the “how to” of the Christian life, we must first understand one thing.

The accomplishment of salvation and sanctification are the work of God alone.

Salvation simply, is God saving us from our sins. Sanctification is a fancy word for making us complete. It is God’s work of turning us into who we were meant to be. He moves us from being horrible wretched sinners to the fullest holy image of God, as we were created to be. While God is the one who does the work, He is awesome in that He doesn’t just make us sit on the side lines. He wants our participation. He wants us to be involved and engaged in the process. We are a part of actually building the relationship with Him, not just watching Him do it. Now is where we insert the cheesy line, “the joy is in the journey.” But it’s true, God calls His people to obey and follow because it builds our character. There is joy in discovering the deep love He has for you. Joy in discovering the career He is leading you to. Joy in friendships and other relationships that will influence your life. There is even joy in the trials that redirect your paths. Obedience shapes us into who we were intended to be before sin messed everything up. God starts and completes our salvation all on his own, but He calls us and *works with us* to enter into our sanctification, and He will complete that too! *We only carry the responsibility to respond to what He is doing.*

Read Philippians 1:1-26.

Phil. 1:1

Fill in the blank.

“Paul and Timothy, _____ of Christ Jesus.”

Right at the start of the letter Paul clearly makes it known that he is not the one in charge. He recognizes and states that he is under the authority of Christ. Paul is not the boss but instead Jesus is running the show.

A bond-servant wasn’t necessarily a bad thing in ancient times. It reflects almost an employer/ employee relationship that we might see today, but with a much more personal affection and affiliation. A bond-servant was a willing slave, happily and loyally linked to their master.

This is how we are to be with Jesus. He is our master, who is in charge of our life and we are His willing slave, happily and loyally linked to him. He is not like human masters though. Jesus has a much deeper and perfect love for us. He always has our best interest at heart, whereas a human master will always be clouded by personal gain no matter how good their intentions might be. Jesus as our Master will always guide us to what is best for us and for HIS Kingdom. That is why Paul could so fully trust and obey God even in the most extreme circumstances, like being in prison, because God is good and looking out for his good.

Read Isaiah 46: 9-11

There is no one like God. He is the only being that has the power to will something to happen. I mean can you really grasp that whole picture? No person, or thing, or power, on this earth or in the universe, has the ability to make anything happen. Only God. He not only knows what the future holds, but He is the one that plans and orchestrates how it comes to be. This mighty God, loves you more than you can even imagine, and wants to give you blessing upon blessing. I mean really, think about that. He wants to invite you into the work He is doing. The question is, are you his bond-servant? Are you happily linked to Him? Do you call Him master and live your life accordingly?

Paul, the great apostle knows from the get go, that nothing he does is worth anything. It's all about God, and the works God is doing. Paul recognizes and understands that. He submits himself to the direction and leading of the Lord. If we claim to follow Jesus, we must do the same and understand that HE is the one leading this dance.

How do you struggle letting God be the one in charge? Do you struggle with living in submission to Him? If not, how did you get to that point of obedience?

Read Phil. 1:6

Fill in the blank:

*"For I am _____ of his very thing, that He who began a _____
_____ in you will _____ it until the day of Christ Jesus."*

What is Paul confident of? _____

What is the work the Philippians have been doing? (verse 5): _____

Paul prays that their Love will keep growing in what? (verse 9) _____

For what purpose? (verse 10-11) _____

The Philippians have been partners with Paul in his mission to share the gospel all over the ancient world. This means they literally have been sending him money and supplies so he can focus on the work. Paul established the church in Philippi and they had been supporting him ever since. He sees the work God is doing through them, which is to support the gospel, financially. God has brought them salvation through Paul's Message. Through their belief God uses them to support Paul. It's a wonderful little cycle. But God doesn't just stop there. Paul says, hey guys I see the good work God has started in you, now take it to the next level. God has started it, now grow in your love. He says "so that you may approve things that are excellent."

Love, the real love of Christ, grows in us when we pursue first, knowledge of the truth (God's word in the Bible), and second, discernment (ability to identify right and wrong).

At a deeper level we can see here that love is much more than mushy feelings. You must put these two things into practice. When you pursue these things, knowledge and discernment, you move closer to what you are meant to be.

You move closer to maturity and being the picture of Jesus. This is how you will grow in your love for God, and also for others. Paul wants this maturity and growth for the Philippians and it the same natural progression for you and I.

Phil. 1:12-26

Here we get the first example to follow in Paul himself. Paul has faithfully followed God's call to preach the Gospel and build the Church. However, following God's direction, our homeboy gets throw in prison. But God started a work in him and God will finish it. Paul is evangelizing to the prison guards, and God is changing their lives. Other believers are encouraged and emboldened by Paul's imprisonment. We know some preach out of good intentions while some of the others are just jerks. But no matter their motive, God is continuing the work he started to preach the gospel and build the church through Paul, who is literally in jail! Whether he will live or die is up in the air at this point, and God is still working through him.

What we many see as a setback or discouragement can still be used by God to accomplish His purposes. It matters how we respond to these things, and what we really believe to be true about God. Do we trust Him as master, to have our best interests in mind, and do we trust that he is going to finish the job? Paul did, without a doubt, so much so that he said in verses 25

Fill in the blank:

"_____ of this, I know that I will _____ and _____
with you all for your _____ and joy in the faith."

Paul knows that God is not done using him to fulfill the work He started in the Philippians. They have not yet reached a point of maturity and Paul recognizes that God is not done with them or his own role in their development. God doesn't start something to leave it incomplete. He didn't do that with Paul, the Philippians and he won't do it with you and I. God finishes what He starts.

This is a picture of sanctification (the fancy word for being complete as God intended us to be). The Philippians believed, and were faithful partners to Paul. But God had a bigger plan for them to grow and mature. God is the one who carries out that plan. The plan to help them develop a deeper sense of understanding in His truth. God had a bigger plan than letting Paul's ministry be hindered by prison. A plan to use him despite his chains.

The same is true for us. God has begun something in each of us. He will continue that work. It is not complete. It is not over. God wants you to trust Him as your master, who has your best interest in mind. God wants to bring you to a deep knowledge of Himself, to really show you the depths of how much He loves you, so you can then go share that Love with others. He wants you to be able to know right from wrong so that you can make wise choices for your life. Choices that bring His blessing and not the destruction of sin.

God has begun this work in your life, and I am confident that he will finish what He started in you!

Action Step:

As you go through your day, I want you to focus on what God has started in your life. No matter how big or small your faith is, no matter how old or new, you are here today, on this trip, because God has started some kind of work in your heart. Reflect and write down what you think God is starting for you in this season of life. When you are done draw a symbol of it on your hand or wrist with a sharpie. When you see the symbol on your hand throughout your day, be reminded of what He is doing and say a quick prayer about it.

Philippians

Day 2: Paul and Jesus, examples of Hippo-fuh.
Phil. 1:27- 2:18

So, we know that God is going to finish the work He started. He is the one who will make us complete. So how do we act? What are we supposed to do in this process? What does it look like to respond to what He is doing? We will focus the rest of our study on the examples and directives Paul highlights throughout the rest of the book.

Paul says in **verse 1:27**:

Fill in the blank:

“Only _____ yourselves in a manner _____
of the _____ of Christ.”

Here we see Paul calling the Philippians to respond. He doesn't just say “hey Philippians be grateful, or have a really happy attitude about what Christ has done, but actually change your life.” Actually, live in a way that reflects what Christ has done. Behavior. Actions. Thought life. All of these should become obedient to Jesus's direction. *Conduct* yourself in a *worthy manner*. We are not perfect, we are not “clean”, but we have been made and are being made these things by Jesus! Once we understand and have accepted that reality, we need to act like it. That is our response and responsibility.

Have you ever heard the phrase “fake it till you make it?” it's the idea that you imitate a thought pattern or behavior until it becomes a reality in your life. It's same idea here, but a really big, life-long, take on it. So, we are not perfect, but we continue to discipline our behaviors, actions and thought patterns, imitating what Jesus has modeled for us, until they become our natural behavior and thought patterns. Fake being like Jesus, until you actually act like Jesus. Fake it till you make it. This is our response. This is how we work with Jesus as He is working out our sanctification throughout our lives.

So now is when I would say ... “what does this look like in your life?” And you think Harmony, don't ask me that question! But luckily for us, Paul give us 4 excellent examples of what it should look like, and one example of what it shouldn't. Today we will look at two of those examples.

Read Phil 3:17

Fill in the Blank:

“Brethren, Join in _____ my _____ and
_____ those who _____
according to the pattern you _____ in us.”

In your own words, what is Paul Saying?:

In my opinion this is a major key to understanding the whole book of Philippians. We need to conduct ourselves as worthy of the Gospel, and to do that we look to spiritual mentors farther along than us, and literally copy them. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and the surest way to grow spiritually! Take it to the bank ladies! If we want to grow, we must imitate other spiritually mature people. This means, looking at people in scripture, heroes of the faith throughout history, and people in our own lives here and now.

So, let's start with Paul himself.

Reread Phil: 1:12-30

What initial observations do you make about Paul? What is his focus and how do you know it? What is his attitude?

We already know from Phil 1:1 that Paul is not in charge but views himself as under the direction and leadership of Jesus. In this passage we see his ultimate focus on the mission he was given, which is to share the gospel. If anyone had an excuse to take a break or feel bad for themselves it was Paul. He was beaten, imprisoned, falsely, accused, mocked, shipwrecked twice, and most probably martyred (thought we don't know for sure). Paul's life wasn't easy, or fun, or comfortable, but he didn't care about any of that. He was happy to be in prison because it opened the door to a new audience for him to share the gospel. He didn't care that some people were being jerks and sharing the gospel just for the purpose of making it harder on him while he was in prison. He didn't care what physically happened to his body, so long as it served to glorify God and advance the gospel. Paul had an extreme case of laser like focus on his mission, and nothing would keep him from that.

Jump over to Chapter 4 and **read verses 4:10-14.**

What does this section of scripture teach us about Paul?

Paul had complete and total trust in the in the goodness and provision of Jesus. No matter what was going on, no matter the circumstances. Paul relied only on Jesus, and nothing else. His confidence, trust, peace, joy, strength, wisdom, decisions, actions, behaviors, thought patterns, were all dependent upon Jesus, and no other person, place, or thing.

Verse 4:13:

Fill in the blanks

"I can do _____ things through _____ who _____ me."

Stop for a second and really think about what that means. What that meant for Paul, and what that means for your Life. I'll wait.....

Now write out what you thought about it: (you're welcome)

Paul's example to us: 1) Submission to Jesus's leading, **2)** Laser focus on his mission, and **3)** utter dependence on Jesus to carryout that mission.

So, Paul's example is pretty good, but we won't stop there because I mean what kind of Christians would we be if we didn't use Jesus as an example. Duh. And Luckily for us, the text naturally leads us to Jesus as the next example anyway! Woo hoo.

Read Phil 2: 1-11

There are so many examples Jesus shows us as we read through the pages of scripture, but I think Paul was very intentional when he chose to use Christ as the person to point us to selfless humility. There is no greater example than Jesus for this. Spoiler alert, the main point here is that we as Christians need to be unified together, of one mind about things. I hope you noticed throughout the whole book of Philippians because Paul keeps saying this over and over. Jesus is the example for how we should do that well... because I mean look around at the modern Church, clearly it's not easy!

Fill in the blanks **verse 2:3**

“Do nothing from _____ or _____, but with _____ of mind regard _____ as more _____ than yourselves.”

What is humility? I think sometimes we get that confused with low self-worth. We might think that being humble has to mean that we suck. But that's just not true. The dictionary defines humility as “a modest or low-view of one's own importance.” Notice that it didn't say value, it said importance. To be humble means we see our importance as less than others. Think about what is the opposite of humble? It's those people you know who think they are better than everyone else. Always talking about how great they are at everything. What they have to say is always right. They are the ones who can't take directions, or listen to others. Why? Because they think they are more important than everyone else. They lack humility and have a high view of their importance. Being important and having intrinsic (natural God-given) value are two different things. One is a mindset, and the other a fact.

Paul tells us that if we are to follow the example of Jesus, we need to be humble and consider other people more *important* than ourselves. Not of more value, but of more importance. Put others first. This is a simple concept but harder to put into real life practice.

The text speaks to how Jesus did this:

1. **Verse 6-7 says:** that he didn't hold the fact that He was God over us, but became a bond-servant (where have we heard that before?). Jesus is literally the most important. He is God. He lowered himself and his importance to come to earth for our best interest. (which is to be saved from sin and be in relationship with Him, if case you didn't know that already)
2. The second half of **verse 7** says he became a man. That means he gave up all the fanciness of being God, and took on the flesh of humanity. Physically! He left his glory, his blazing, blinding, lighting body, and took on our much less impressive human body. (I mean our body is cool, no doubt it was modeled after God, but Jesus's was way cooler). (He gave up his coolness for our best interest)
3. **Verse 8 says** He was in complete obedience to the will of the Father. Being a bond-servant, he was not in charge but let God run the show. I mean like go to your death obedient. Not a quick death. Not a clean death. But an excruciatingly, physically and emotionally, painful death. (That, taking on the full wrath of God against all humanity throughout history both past a future while simultaneously being cut off from the perfect love of and relationship with your father, kind of painful death. God literally turned His back on Jesus in His time of need.) (for our best interest.)
4. (clearly, I'm really into parentheses for this section) (really) (I'm lovin' em)

What do you see here that you could describe as the key to humility?

If we have a low view of our importance and consider other people more important than ourselves, we are probably going to have a better chance at being unified. I think that is what Paul is trying to get at here. If we are humble, we will

have less grumbling, less arguments (*Verse 2:14*). Jesus gives us an extreme example. If He can do that much for us, I bet we can find a way to do even a fraction of that. We can give grace to our parents when they are short with us, because we know they are frustrated. We can take our commitments seriously because we know how they might affect the other people involved. (Showing up to work on time, and ready. Keeping plans with friends.) Hearing out one of your classmates who has total opposite view as you and really trying to understand them without having to make your view heard (listening book, you know what I'm taking about). Because you consider yourself less important, and that person more important. Humility. Puts. Others. First. Always. H.P.O.F.A.

Jesus example to us: 1) Obedient to the will of the Father and **2)** Humble, putting others before Himself.

Between Jesus and Paul's examples, you should be able to start to piece together a practical picture of what we should be doing with our behaviors, actions and thought patterns, as we are trying to "fake till we make it."

Write out in your own words what you learned from the examples of Paul and Jesus:

Action Step

Today's action step might seem silly but I promise it has a purpose. So, only a few lines up from here you will see a lovely little acronym, HPOFA. Humility Puts Others First Always. You can pronounce it: *hippo-fuh*. I know it's stupid. But here is what we are going to do. As you go through the day today, I want you to observe the people around you and also yourself. Every time you see someone else do something humble, I want you to say *hippo-fuh*. Every time you do something that puts others before yourself, I want you to say *hippo-fuh*. You can do it out loud, or under your breath, but *I want you to verbalize it*. Just thinking it is ok, but there is more staying power when you have to actually make the effort to make sound come out of your mouth. Start to train your thought life to focus on other people first, not yourself.

If you have any other thoughts for today you can write them here.

Philippians

Day 3: More of the same.

Phil. 2: 19-30

Yesterday we read that Paul gives us four examples of people we should imitate. Paul and Jesus were two of four we looked at. Paul was submissive to the father, laser focused and dependent on God. Jesus was obedient and humble (among many other things). I hope you are starting to see a pattern. Their lives weren't about them. Your life is not about you. I will repeat this until I die, guys. Your life is not about you. It's about the bigger picture, it's about what God is doing in the world and how you can jump on board with that. Before I get to sidetracked, let me stay laser focused on our passage for today. (see what I did there, yuck yuck)

Read Phil. 2:19-30

The last two examples are found in Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy was Paul's right-hand man, his protégé so to speak. Timothy was like a son to Paul. While Epaphroditus was a messenger or representative, from the church at Philippi.

** Ep-af-ro-deye-tus, I know you're struggling to pronounce this name. (good luck).*

We will look at Timothy first.

Fill in the Blanks: Phil. 2:20

"I have _____ else like him, who will show _____
concern for your _____."

At first glance this looks like such a small and insignificant piece of scripture. Verses 19-24, are 6 tiny verses that seem more like travel plans than a shining example. The key is verse 3:17, like I've said before. When we read the context, we can figure out that 3:17 is a cute little endcap to what Paul just spent 76 verses talking about. He lists off a bunch of people that are awesome and then says, be like them. That's how we know there is more than just travel details happening in these few verses. Why didn't Paul write more about Timothy if he was such a good example? Well, keep in mind that the Philippians would have known Timothy well. He is not a stranger to them. Paul didn't need to go into detail, because they already knew his character and the kind of man he was. Verse 2:22 tell us that outright.

Look at our fill in the blank verse again and write out who else from our examples this reminds you of and why? (hint, v. 21 might help, and think HPOFA.)

Timothy, like Paul, like Jesus, was concerned for the welfare of the Philippians. Genuinely. He had their best interest at heart and was concerned with the bigger picture of advancing the gospel. Timothy, had the mindset of Christ and put others first. I hope you can see that each of our examples echo the same themes. Humility, others first, obedience, laser focus on the mission.

So, what kind of man was Timothy? Scripture gives us a picture. Look at these verses and write out what they tell us about Timothy:

2 Tim. 1:5

Acts 16:1-2

2 Tim: 4:1-2

Raised in the faith, respected by believers, a pastor. If you take some time to read through Acts and 1 and 2 Timothy you get the idea. Timothy was a great guy and a key leader in establishing the beginning of the church, with Paul. He was entrusted by Paul to carry on his ministry after he died. Timothy is guy worth modeling ourselves after. This is what he is saying to the Philippians, and they already knew this because they knew him.

Timothy's Example: 1) Genuine concern for others.

Now on to Epaphroditus. Go ahead, try and say it.

Here is another man that the Philippians know well. He is one of them, their very own messenger. So again, we don't get to read tons of passages about him because the Philippians already knew him. They knew the kind of man he was. So, let's focus on what Paul highlights about him.

Read verse 2:29-30:

Fill in the blanks:

"Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and _____ men like him in _____
_____; because he came close to _____ for the _____ of
Christ, _____ his _____ to complete what was deficient in your service to me."

Selfless dedication to the mission and concern for the well-being of others. This is what Epaphroditus brings to the table. And if you feel like you're getting hit over the head with the same themes over and over, good. Paul is trying to make one point. Just one. Epaphroditus almost died because he was so sick, and his major concern was that his friends in Philippi would be upset about it. HPOFA. We are seeing examples of people who are willing to do what it takes to fulfill the mission of God, despite the cost, for the good of other people. This is what we need to be looking for in other people, and be like them.

Epaphroditus shows us 1) Selfless dedication to the mission and **2)** a major sensitivity to others concerns.

From our two examples today, write in your own words what we should be like as Christians:

Acton Step:

Today look around for people who display characteristics of humility, selflessness, concern for others, or laser focus. When you see it, take a picture of them with your phone. It doesn't have to be a great picture. Just a picture. Tonight we will share our pictures and what it was about that person or moment that reminded you about what we are learning.

Philippians

Day 4: The Dogs

Phil. 3: 1-21

So far, we have looked at our four examples, Paul, Jesus, Timothy and Epaphroditus. I hope by now you have it in your head that we need to care about others first. We need to be selfless and laser focused on what God is doing, despite the cost to us. If you don't see that yet, then I've done something wrong. Today let's shift gears a little bit and look at the same thing in a different way. A good explanation of something shows you what it should look like and also, what *it shouldn't look like*. We focus now on the "shouldn't".

Read Phil. 3:1-21.

Paul has already, probably in a previous letter, laid this concept out for the Philippians. But, there is no harm done in repeating a warning. Safety First. Everyone needs a reminder from time to time. The truth is this friends, we will become who we spend time with. We will become the people we look up to. We will become the people we admire. If we want to imitate maturity we need to hang out with maturity. If we want to know truth, we need to study it. If we want to grow, we need to hang out with people who are growing. You have to be mindful and intentional in doing this. It takes effort. Growth, maturity, imitating mature people, DOESN'T JUST HAPPEN. You have to decide you want it, and then pursue it. Paul calls us to look for the spiritually mature and imitate them but if we are not careful, we will imitate some people who are not so great.

Fill in the blanks:

Phil. 3:2 says,

"_____ of the dogs, _____ of the evil workers, _____ of the false circumcision."

In the bible, anytime you see something repeated its usually because the author is trying to draw focus on that thing. It means its important. Beware literally means: Be on your guard. Look out. Be on the alert. Keep your eyes open. Honestly as humans, we copy what we see. We copy what's around us and imitate people we spend time with. You must be on guard and keep your eyes open to what negative things or people may be influencing your life.

Being aware of what it *doesn't* look like, is essential. We have to be able to recognize behaviors and people who will lead us away from God. We have to recognize those people and habits that will keep us trapped in our sin. We have to be on guard for these things and people in our life, and *put forth effort not to imitate them*. We must be mindful of how they influence and affect us, and cut them out of our life if necessary. It is hard to be vigilant because it takes effort. If we are not vigilant, we will imitate whatever is right in front of us. So be careful what you put in front of you.

Who are the dogs, evil workers, false circumcision/mutilators? These three names Paul gives to a group called the Judaizers. Basically, they are a group of super legalistic, stuffy, religious Jews who were jerks. They viewed salvation as attainable by strict adherence to the law, through human effort. Salvation literally through circumcision alone. They were vicious, and uncontrolled, focusing on human efforts and not the work of Christ. Their circumcision held no spiritual symbolism, but mimicked the mutilating rituals of pagan worship. In short, they totally missed the point of Jesus, and the whole, grace-love-truth thing, He was trying to show people.

Do you see any examples in our modern day of religious groups that totally miss the point? Explain why.

Read Phil 3:19

Fill in the blanks:

“whose end is destruction, whose _____ is their _____, and whose glory is in their _____,
Who set their _____ on _____ things.”

What is the major problem you see here?

Our Judaizer friends missed the point and were only focused their own desires, their own glory and to what is happening here on earth. In short, it was all about them, and what they could do. Self-focus. Only concerned with their own agenda. Let's break that down a little further.

- **Appetites:** Our “dogs” are ruled by their desires and impulses. We all have needs, desires and impulses. We desire to sleep when we are tired. We have a desire for food when we are hungry. We have impulses towards pleasure, comfort, or delight. These desires, or appetites, in and of themselves are not evil or bad. Most are given to us by God for a purpose. But here's where the problem lies, the dogs made these God-given desires their ruling guide. They let desire be the leader, their god. Instead of being self-controlled, managing desires and impulses in a way pleasing to God, they let them run wild and dictate the actions, behaviors and thought patterns of their lives. ***Uncontrolled desire = sin.***
- **Glory:** Our “evildoers” missed the point. They claim the glory of what Christ did on the cross for themselves in their own efforts and actions. They placed high value on their own works, and lower value on Christ's saving work. To rely on your own effort, is to deny what Christ did. To claim Christ, yet deny what He did, and lead others away from it, is evil. It shifts all the focus from Christ, to yourself. ***Seeking your own glory = sin.***
- **Mutilators:** These “mutilators” were concerned about earthly matters. Proof. They wanted gentile (non-Jewish) converts to prove they had genuine faith, by physical demonstration. Simply, they believed you didn't have real faith, you weren't saved, if you did not endure the pain of circumcision. There had to be some physical “proof” of your faith. This is an earthly concern, the need to physically manifest what God has done. Again, it totally misses the point of what Jesus was talking about all along. God only cares about a person's heart. Jesus's whole mission was to complete and do away with the need for physical acts of the law, so we don't have to keep doing that stuff. But the Judaizers missed that point. They were only concerned about proof. ***Earthly concerns. Misplaced focus = sin***

Be on the look-out for: uncontrolled desires, seeking your own glory, and misplaced focus on earthly things. To sum it up for you in one simple phrase: *confidence in the flesh, and not in Christ.*

Do you recognize in your own life uncontrolled desires, times when you seek your own glory, or where you have misplaced your focus on earthly things? Explain

Read Phil. 3:2-11 again.

Fill in the blanks: V. 3:7

“But whatever things were _____ to me, I have counted as _____
for the _____ of _____.”

Paul had more reason than anybody to put confidence in the flesh according to the Law. By the Judaiser’s standards Paul was a golden boy. Before he knew Christ, Paul was something called a Pharisee. Pharisees were super Jews that stressed strict obedience to the law as outlined in the Old Testament. They had control of the temple, and were very opposed to Jesus and Christians. Each of the things Paul mentions in verses 4-6, are very impressive to this group of people. The modern equivalent might sound like this: “I was born in America, the very best part, I have a job that makes 6 figures, I have hundreds of thousands of followers on social media, and I have incredible political influence.” Paul could have talked a big game, because he had the credentials to back it up. He was born into his position, had a great job, was liked by many and had influence. *Nationality, Job, Influence = earthly things.*

Verse 3:7 however, tell us exactly what Paul thinks of these earthly things. In verse 8 he literally calls them garbage. Write out in your own words why our works and efforts should be counted as “loss.”

Our righteousness, meaning the potential to be cool with (or more formally, in right standing with) God, *does not come from what we do*. It does not come from how good we are, or how perfectly we follow the law. Instead it comes from genuine faith and reliance on Christ. Our resume, our credentials, are just garbage. Where we live, whatever job we have, no matter how influential, or important we are in the eyes of others, means nothing if we don’t have a relationship with Christ. Because when we die and stand before God, He is not going to ask us how nice we were to other people. He’s not going to ask us about our jobs, or the money we made, or how long our streaks on Snapchat were. He is going to ask one thing. Did you believe in my son, Jesus, and what He did on the cross? That’s it. The law, works, or human effort all boils down to being the equivalent of hot garbage before God. All that matters is this; that you know Jesus, and have put your faith in what He did on the cross.

Beware of uncontrolled desires, self-seeking glory, and misplaced focus on earthly things. These are the things that lead us away from Christ. They lead us away from freedom, and into the slavery of sin. Paul goes on to tell us in verse 12-16 that the conforming of actions, behaviors and thought patterns, to being humble like Jesus, is a lifelong process. It Doesn’t happen all at once. We must place our focus what ahead of us and forget what has happened in the past. Your past has no hold on you. Our sin, mistakes, poor choices, don’t affect our relationship with God, so long as we have faith in Jesus. We are free to move forward, and keep our focus on what’s coming, not what has been. Put your effort towards moving towards God, and never give up on that, and take note that it will take the rest of your life.

What kind of people should we be careful NOT to imitate?

Beware of people who 1) Have uncontrolled desires, **2)** seeking glory for themselves, and **3)** have a misplaced focus on earthly thing.

Who you imitate matters, make sure it’s someone who is pushing forward towards God, not living in the slavery of sin.

Action Step:

Today you will get a bag of candy. You are not allowed to look inside the bag of candy. Periodically throughout your day eat one piece at a time. When you eat something you like, pray that the Lord would bring good people into your life to imitate. When you eat something you don’t like, pray that God would help you recognize the things in your life you shouldn’t imitate and what you should do about it.

Philippians

Day 5: Live that practical life.
Phil. 4:1-23

Behavior, actions and thought patterns. These are the things that inform others about what kind of a person we are. These things are crafted in us, through the work of God, by the people we encounter and imitate. Who we spend time with, matters. In humility we need to submit to Jesus leading, put others first and stay focused on the mission. If not, we will be led by uncontrolled desires, seeking our own glory, and be only concerned with earthly things. One leads to freedom, the other to destruction. Keep pushing forward towards God. Your response to God is your responsibility.

Does that sum up what we've talked about so far? I hope so. For our last day, we will examine the very practical side of what it looks like to respond to God, in regards to behaviors, actions and thought life.

Read Phil.4:1-23

Fill in the blank: 4:1

"_____, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way
_____ in the _____, my beloved."

In most translations, chapter 4 starts with the word therefore. When I was in school one of my professors said, "anytime you see the word therefore, you have to figure out what it's there for." It's a transition word that links one concept to another. So, here is your test, what is it there for?

Yesterday we talked about "the dogs," who were reliant on their own works. Paul is literally in tears over the enemies of the cross, people who claim to know God but totally miss the point. These people are leading others away from God. Yet we have the faithful Philippians. Paul tells them, because there are people misleading others, you need to stand firm. Stay true. "Therefore brethren....stand firm in the lord." (hint that's what it's there for) Chapter 4 tell us how we can stand firm in the Lord, so we don't end up like the "dogs" we just read about.

Let's break it down verse by verse by verse.

4:2-4: This might seem like an out of place tid-bit about two ladies who can't just get along. However, it's the pinnacle of a running theme Paul keeps mentioning throughout the book, and one we need to take to heart. Quickly reread these verses and write one thing we need to stand firm? *Phil: 1:27, 2:2, 2:14-15*

4:5-7: Again, not something new here, we see an example of complete and utter *trust in the Lord*. Paul says: "Rejoice in all things." In both good and bad, we can rejoice because we trust God has our best interest in mind. We don't have to be anxious, because we know God has all power and accomplishes what He starts. Instead of being anxious we can turn to Him in prayer and trust He is working it out. And it is this complete trust in God's power and goodness that we can have a peace that doesn't make any sense in hard times, because we know God is good and in control.

4:8: Thought Life. How you think, and what you think about is so important! Paul tells the Philippians here is a list of what should consume your thoughts. If it's outside of this list, it's probably not good for you. We must to have self-control over our thought life. We have to discipline and train our thoughts to focus on what is good. To focus on God and the concerns of God, not earthly things.

4:9: What have we been talking about this whole time? Look around at people and things that are mature, growing, healthy and copy that.

Unity with other believers. Complete trust in God. Self-Controlled thought life. Imitation of mature believers.
UNITY ** TRUST ** SELF-CONTROL ** IMITATION

If you want to stand firm in the Lord. If you don't want to be lured away by false teachers. If you want freedom and not destruction. Paul tells us we need these things;

- You must seek unity, and work towards it. We must help others work towards unity. We need unity. (Exactly what this this looks like while still holding to your convictions is lesson for another trip!)
- You must have complete and total trust in the Lord. You have to have a relationship with Him. You have to know, through your own experience, the power of how He can change your life. To know Him as your creator *who loves you more than you can even imagine*. You have to know Him as the one who designed you for a purpose. When you know Him, you can trust that that He is orchestrating your life towards that purpose. You don't have to be anxious because you know He's got it on lock.
- You must exercise self-control in all things but it begins in your thought life. What you think in your mind is what eventually comes out in your actions and behaviors. It's just a fact. What you think about matters. Do you want to stand firm? Then control what you think about and don't let your thoughts control you.
- You must get a mentor. Look around your life. What kind of people and things are influencing you? Do you look up to people who are spiritually mature, growing, healthy? Do you value celebrities, culture, friends? What are you copying? Because we all copy something, there is no way around it. If you want to stand firm in the Lord, copy others who are trying to be like Jesus, and be on the lookout for those that are not.

Do you see these four things in your life? Are they thriving? Or are they struggling? Honestly asses each of these areas in your own life and then expand on what you want to do about it.

UNITY _____

TRUST _____

SELF-CONTROL _____

IMITATION _____

And now we come to the conclusion of the book. Paul wraps it all up with a word of encouragement, and for us it is one last glimpse at something we can imitate. Paul's verbiage throughout the book is clear that he has a deep affection for the Philippians. They are homies. Paul, reminds them of how faithfully they have been supporting him financially on his mission. And not only of the blessing it has been for him, but also the blessing it will prove to be for their own faith. We can take note that sometimes we are to do ministry and sometimes we are called to support others doing ministry.

I want to point out that sometimes the way God works doesn't make sense by our human logic. When we give away our money, God continues to provide for us. When we give away our time, God still helps us find a way to get done what needs to be done. God call us to be selfless for other's needs, and to trust Him to provide what we might be lacking. When we can embrace this wild God logic, we will see God do some awesome things.

Read Phil 4:19

Fill in the blank: (I just had to do one more)

" and my God will _____ all your _____ according to His
_____ in glory in _____."

This is how I want to end. **Girl, He's got you.** He is going to provide for you. He will take care of you. He has all you need, and He is everything you need. He has a plan, and He is asking you to trust Him. To step into that plan and look to Him for everything. Financially, emotionally, and everything in between. He knows your heart. He knows your fears, your concerns, your dreams, your hopes. HE KNOWS YOU. And He will provide for *all your needs*. Your job is to respond, and really you only have two choices: Step in, or run away.

God calls us to a life of purpose for His kingdom, it's full and rich with blessing though it's not always easy. We respond to Him by living a life that is fully submissive and reliant upon Him, humbly focused on others, and laser focused on His mission. This is true freedom. It's a life-long process that we know God will be faithful to complete in us.

Our other option is destruction. We can choose not to respond. We can choose to remain controlled by the whims of our desires, only focused on ourselves and our own mission, and concerned with the things of this world. We can choose to remain slaves to sin. Slowly, painfully, subtly destroying ourselves.

God will finish what He started. Imitate people who follow Christ and be on the lookout for those who aren't. Submit to and trust God, put others first, stay focused on the mission. Stand firm in the Lord, and respond practically with your behaviors, actions and thought life.

We still have a few more days before we go home, but I want you to be thinking about what needs to change in your life. God started a work in your heart. You're here right now because of that. Spend some time this morning reflecting on all that you have learned and experienced so far this week. Then ask yourself, what habits do you want to change? What things or people do you need to move away from, so you can move closer to God? How do you need to exercise self-control over your thought life? What do you want to be different when you go home? And what are you going to do intentionally to actually make that happen?

****I want to add that this isn't meant to be a time where you dwell on all your "failures." It's about being intentional and open to what God is working on in your heart. If you find that you keep getting stuck on negative thoughts about yourself, take control in that moment and pray that God would show what's really going on underneath those thoughts and what you should do about it. It's ok if doing this kind of activity is hard, because honestly it takes practice. If you struggle with it, pay attention to that and we will talk through it tonight as well.**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.