

God Finishes What He Starts

Philippians 1:1-6

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This past week, ABC News ran a post with the same headline twice within five days, using a different image of an empty church each time: “*Churches Fight to Stay Open as Attendance Dwindles.*” It’s as if the editors took pleasure in this news by making sure no one missed this breaking story. Here’s how the article begins.

Churches faced with empty pews are fighting to keep their doors open, while former houses of worship are being converted into bars, clubs and luxury condos. In the late 1940s, nearly 80% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue, mosque or temple, according to Gallup. Today, just 45% say the same, the analytics company noted, and only 32% say that they worship God in a house of prayer once a week.

The first post garnered over 43,000 comments. I spent some time reading many of them. Here’s a sampling.

- *The decline in regular church service attendance correlates with our nation’s spiritual, moral, and cultural decline.*
- *I feel as if I can become closer to the Lord in a Waffle House than in a church.*
- *Here in Africa, old shopping centers and manufacturing plants are being turned into churches.*
- *Our church is not having this issue. It might depend on the type of church one is attending!*
- *I love my church! I’m reading this thread and it so disheartening...we believers are not perfect, and the church is a place where we all heal.*
- *Faith is making a comeback and rising...*

There’s no doubt there’s been an alarming exodus of people from churches, but we also know that Jesus made this promise in Matthew 16:18: “***I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.***” Jesus is not finished building His church and I believe He is refining and reviving His remnant of redeemed believers. As we’ve said before, the church is God’s

Plan A, and there is no Plan B! On an individual level, we all mess up and fall short, but God promises to finish what He has started in our lives.

Here's what I'm hoping we'll learn today: *God will complete His work in us as we partner with Him in His work.*

This weekend we're beginning a brand-new sermon series from the Book of Philippians called, "A Journey to Joy." Philippians has been called one of the Apostle Paul's most personal letters and is perhaps the most quoted in the entire Bible. Here are a few of its greatest hits.

1:21 – ***"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*** (this was my text for Marvetta Jones' funeral message on Thursday)

2:10-11 – ***"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."***

3:13 – ***"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."***

4:13 – ***"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."***

Background to the Book

When studying a book of the Bible, it's helpful to begin with some background. This will enable us to understand the circumstances under which it was written so we can make accurate application to our own lives.

- The name *Philippians* comes from a city named Philippi in what is now Greece.
- Because it's a letter, it's intended to be read in its entirety. I encourage you to read this journal of joy at least once a week between now and Easter.
- The Apostle Paul was in a Roman prison when he penned these words. His thoughts are filled with thankfulness for the generosity and partnership of the Philippian believers.

God brought Paul to Philippi in a very fascinating way by closing one door and opening another as we read in Acts 16:9-10: ***"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and***

saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

Once they arrived, Paul and his team met a woman named Lydia, who was a successful businesswoman. She was the first convert to Christ in Europe and became an anchor in the assembly at Philippi. After being baptized, she opened her home for ministry (see verse 15). Incidentally, our next baptisms will take place February 22-23. Fill out a Next Steps card to get on the growing list of those ready to take the plunge.

After Lydia and other members of her household were saved, Paul and his companions met a young slave girl who was involved in fortune-telling. Paul recognized that she was in bondage to the devil, so he cast an evil spirit out of her. This created such an uproar, especially among her owners, that Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown in jail.

About midnight, while Paul and Silas were singing hymns, an earthquake shook the prison and opened the doors. The jailer freaked out and asked the question we all need to ask at some point in our lives: ***“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*** The answer is clear in verse 31: ***“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”***

Like Lydia, his household came to saving faith and they too, followed the Lord in believer’s baptism. Verse 34 tells us that joy came to them because Jesus had come into their lives: ***“And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.”***

In verse 40, we read that Paul and Silas went to Lydia’s house again to encourage the believers to keep growing in their faith before they left: ***“And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.”*** Paul visited this church sometime later and wrote a very personal and warm letter, one decade later. That letter known as Philippians is in our Bibles today.

With that as a brief background, let’s read and feed from Philippians 1:1-6: ***“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. 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.”

This passage teaches us six truths about our identity and purpose.

1. We are servants and saints (1a). A young daughter went fishing with her dad, and after a few minutes, she threw her fishing pole down and started walking away. The father asked, “*What’s the matter, honey?*” To which she replied, “*Nothing, except I can’t seem to get waited on.*” We all want to be waited on, don’t we?

It’s very interesting in verse 1 that Paul does not identify himself as an apostle, or as the esteemed church planter. He calls himself and Timothy “*servants.*” This word literally means, “*slave*” and refers to “*one so bound to another that his will is altogether consumed in the will of the other.*”

If you are a believer, settle the fact that you are a servant of the Savior. You and I belong to Him and therefore we must serve Him and His will for the rest of our lives. We are not volunteers who can come and go and choose our own agenda; we are servants who are called to serve with unflinching loyalty and uncompromising obedience.

You and I are servants and we’re also saints. We see this in the next phrase in verse 1: “*To all the saints in Christ Jesus.*” Some of us are uncomfortable with this title because we’ve been taught that a “saint” is someone who has lived an exemplary life, performed some miracles, and been canonized by the pope. However, the Bible teaches that every born-again Christian is a saint. That means that if your name is Susan, you are really “Saint Susan.” If your name is Sam, you can ask people to start calling you “Saint Sam.” The word literally means, “*One who is set apart.*” Since we are saints, we should put our position into practice by acting in holy ways as we serve others.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are servants, and we are saints. That leads to a second point.

2. We are positioned at a place for His purposes (1b). We see this in the last part of verse 1: “*...who are at Philippi....*” God’s plan has always been

for the local church to be part of a community to make a kingdom impact. We are one of the churches in the Quad Cities so that we can impact the continents of the world. Bringing this closer to home, this means you are in your neighborhood for a redemptive reason and your position at work or school is a platform for living on mission.

The past fall, the pastoral and deacon teams spent several months refining our mission statement to capture the command of the Great Commission. Here's where we landed: *"Living on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations."* I'll explain more about this at our annual meeting on January 19.

Notice the next phrase, *"...with the overseers and deacons."* We are meant to minister in tandem with the servant leaders called to lead the church. The word **"overseer"** is another word for elder and refers to those *"charged with exercising watchful care over God's church."* In our context, this role is fulfilled by our pastoral team.

The term **"deacons,"** means, *"those who wait on tables as servants"* as they serve side-by-side with the pastors, who are primarily charged with preaching, teaching, and praying. The Deacons hold me accountable.

This shows that the early church organized itself relatively quickly by appointing Overseers and Deacons. In our context, we also have a Trustee team which is entrusted with the physical and facility aspects of our ministry.

Members will have the opportunity to elect deacons and trustees for 2025 at our annual meeting. A copy of the ballot is posted in both lobbies, and we've also made the bios of each candidate available at the Welcome Center. There are also copies of a couple proposals from the deacons. Here are the nominees for deacons: Matt Bowman, Steve Curry, Terry Hartley, Kim Hawkins, Rocky Jones, Nick Juenger, Souk Kongkousonh, Dale Steele, and Larry Wilson.

Those nominated to serve as trustees are Clint Cox, Bruce Daasch, Drew Debrey, Nick Eckermann, Bob Hartley, Mike Janecek, Paul Janecek, Micah Kuriscak, Douglas Moore, Jacob Peiper, Gary Pinger, Brad Rollins, Wade Rollins, and Jim White.

God has each of us here for such a time as this. Whether you *want* to be in your neighborhood, at your school, or at your job is irrelevant. You are where you are because God has holy purposes for you. And God has each of us at Edgewood so that together we can live on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations.

As servants and saints, we are positioned on purpose for His purposes in a particular place.

God will complete His work in us as we partner with Him in His work.

3. We have been granted grace and peace (2). Notice how verse 2 begins: ***“Grace to you and peace...”*** *Grace* is God’s undeserved favor demonstrated when Jesus Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). *Grace* is receiving God’s blessing when we deserve God’s blast. *Peace* is the result of the reconciliation that Jesus made between us and a holy God. *Peace* primarily signifies wholeness by bringing together those who have been in conflict. Notice both grace and truth come from ***“God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”***

A couple years ago, I read the beginning of each of Paul’s letters and was stunned to discover that in each one he gives a greeting of ***“grace and peace from God”*** (in his letters to Timothy, he includes, “mercy”). In the Apostle Peter’s two letters, he adds, ***“May grace and peace be MULTIPLIED to you.”***

Grace is the first thing that comes from God, and peace is a gift that flows from that grace. Until we receive God’s grace, we can’t be at peace with Him...or with others. And, without God’s grace, we won’t experience inner peace. These are good words as we process the terrorist attacks in our country this week.

May those of us who know God’s grace show that grace by living in multiplied peace internally, and with those around us today.

4. We can have joy because of Jesus (3-4). In verse 3, Paul is filled with thankfulness every time he remembers the Philippian faithful: ***“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.”*** We should follow this same pattern. When you think of a fellow follower of Christ, give thanks to God for their

uniqueness, for how grace and peace have impacted their lives, for how they are living out their purpose in a particular place and for how they are serving as saints. This is not easy to do because many of us find it easier to point out people's problems as we celebrate their shortcomings. Let's follow Paul's example by thanking God every time we remember a brother or sister in Christ.

Notice in verse 4 how Paul prays: ***“always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.”*** *Always* in every prayer, he prays for *all* of them. The word ***“always”*** is in the present tense, meaning he continually prays for them ***“with joy.”*** One morning this past week, I read the entire book of Philippians and observed the words joy, rejoice, and glad are found 17 times!

While joy is a repeated theme and is used in Philippians more than in any other letter Paul's most prominent thought was not joy, but rather Jesus, for His name is used seventeen times in the first chapter alone. Because he was so focused on Jesus and wanted to know Him more and more, he was able to experience joy while in a dirty and depressing prison. To be filled with the Redeemer is to be filled with rejoicing. To accept Jesus is to experience joy.

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5. We are partners in the gospel (5). Joy is the fruit of knowing Jesus and is also linked to the progress of the gospel. When the Apostle hears of God's Word going forth with power, he breaks out into rejoicing in verse 5: ***“because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”*** The word ***“partnership”*** is the word that is often translated *“fellowship.”* For some of us, fellowship means drinking coffee and talking about sports but it's more than that. The word has a deeper meaning as it conveys the idea of *“purposeful participation.”*

One pastor perceptively points out: *“True Christian fellowship means sharing the same vision of getting the gospel to the world and then investing personally to make it happen...doing whatever it takes to spread the life-changing message to the ends of the earth.”*

Last week, I mentioned how Edgewood members Aaron and Amanda Langworthy are seeking more financial partners so they can reach the

unreached in Uganda. Because Beth and I are financial partners with them, we receive a magazine called, “Message” published by ABWE, their sending agency. I was struck by what their president wrote in the recent issue:

*“Our work is not merely about sending missionaries or funding projects; it’s about **partnering** with you, the body of Christ, to see the gospel reach every tribe, tongue, and nation...we exist specifically to **serve the local church in order to grow the global church.**”*

I’m humbled by how the Holy Spirit is building a partnership between givers and goers at Edgewood! As we continue to gather and grow, we can’t help but give and go!

- This past weekend we invited Joshua Ngao to share about the strategic importance of sponsoring children through Fishers of Men ministries. I’m pleased to report that the servants and saints of Edgewood sponsored 30 children! Ten others have already been sponsoring children. In addition, our EdgeKids ministry sponsors two children named Grace and James.
- God has also moved Bruce and Cathy Peters to spend six weeks in the Philippines to encourage a Wycliffe Bible translation team, participate in community outreach, and minister to children at the Haven of Hope Orphanage. They leave on Monday.
- God has also mobilized Lance Heuer to serve with Edgewood missionaries Paul and Roxanne Wilson for four months at El Monte in Mexico. Lance was on the July trip to Mexico where he learned about the needs of this ministry. He will be teaching English to Mexican missionaries who will be headed to several unreached parts of the world. This is the same ministry Emma Janacek had during her gap year. Lance will be leaving on Tuesday.

I’d like to invite Bruce, Cathy, and Lance up front now so we can partner with them in prayer.

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6. We are all in process. We are partners and we're also in process. If you haven't memorized Philippians 1:6 yet, I urge you to do so: ***“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.”*** The phrase, ***“I am sure”*** means to be ***“fully persuaded and completely convinced beyond all doubt.”*** Our confidence that God will complete His work in us is profound, personal, and powerful.

Psalm 57:2 echoes this certainty: ***“I cry out to God most High, to God who fulfills His purpose for me.”*** Psalm 138:8 says, ***“The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me...”***

God always finishes what He starts. Specifically, this involves three aspects:

- **God commences His work in us.** The theological word for this is *justification*. God takes the initiative in starting His work in us. We see this in Lydia's conversion. According to Acts 16:14, ***“The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.”***
- **God continues His work in us.** The term for this is *sanctification*, which means to be made progressively more holy, more conformed to the image of His Son. As we learned last weekend, *the pursuit of holy living is the pathway to a happy life*. God is at work even when we can't see Him and He often uses tough times to build our character and fortify our faith.
- **God will complete His work in us.** The word ***“completion”*** means, ***“to finish or perfect”*** and was used for putting the finishing touches on something. The theological term is *glorification*. When you stand before Christ face-to-face, you will be fully finished and completely conformed to His image.

There's an old children's song that speaks to this truth.

*He's still working on me
To make me what I need to be.
It took him just a week to make the moon and stars
The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars.
How loving and patient He must be
'Cause He's still workin' on me.*

*There really ought to be a sign upon my heart
Don't judge him yet, there's an unfinished part.
But I'll be perfect, just according to His plan
Fashioned by the Master's loving hand.*

John Newton said it in different way: *"I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am."*

Summary

God will complete His work in us as we partner with Him in His work.

- 1. We are servants and saints.**
- 2. We are positioned at a place for His purposes.**
- 3. We have been granted grace and peace.**
- 4. We can have joy because of Jesus.**
- 5. We are partners in the gospel.**
- 6. We are all in process.**

One day, Billy and Ruth Graham were driving through a long stretch of road construction. They encountered numerous slowdowns, detours, and stops along the way. Finally, they reached the end of all that difficulty, and smooth pavement stretched out before them. At that point, a sign caught Ruth's attention: *"End of construction. Thanks for your patience."* She turned to Billy and told him that phrase would be a fitting inscription for her tombstone someday.

That's a good reminder. While we're alive, we're under construction. When we die, if we know Christ, we'll be complete. In the meantime, let's be patient with each other and with ourselves.

This passage applies to us individually but is also written to us as a church. This year, Edgewood celebrates 120 years of faithful gospel ministry. As long as we remain doctrinally sound, focused on the gospel, and continue to make disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations, we'll flourish and be fruitful.

In 1905, over 40 charter members of Edgewood covenanted together: “...to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expense of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.”

Recently, Chuck Henson sent me some newspaper articles about Edgewood. One, from 1905, reads, “*The name of the new church organization of which Mr. Hazen is pastor will be Edgewood Baptist Church.*” I smiled when I read these words from an article published in 1968: “*Rev. Baugh said that giving to foreign missions actually increases our receipts for the local church. This may appear to be paradoxical, but it is literally true since it enhances our sense of partnership with God.*”

Speaking of all nations, the Unreached Prayer Night is Monday night at 7:00 p.m. If you want to know more about missions, we’re having a missions interest meeting at 6:00 p.m. We’re also kicking off a six-week Missions Course on Sunday, January 19, at 10:45 a.m. Plans are also underway for a Kenya trip in January 2026.

God began a good work through the charter members 120 years ago, but He is not finished yet! He has more work for us to do, more people to be saved, more missionaries to be sent, more spiritual growth for us as a church. I’m praying that we “Thrive in 2025.” At the beginning of a new year, let’s make sure we’re focused on being partners in the gospel. *Because God will complete His work in us as a church when we partner with Him in His work.*

As we prepare to celebrate communion and remember His work of redemption, let’s repent, recommit, and recalibrate our lives so that as God’s redeemed remnant, we will live out our mission of making disciples among our neighbors and the nations as we gather, grow, give, and go with the gospel, all for the glory of God! What God starts, He finishes! I wonder if ABC News will cover that story.

Communion

1 Corinthians 11:28 says we’re not to take communion flippantly: “***Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.***” The bread represents His body, and the cup is a reminder of His blood which paid the ransom price for our forgiveness and freedom. As we

celebrate communion, let's remember that Jesus has finished His work. In a prayer to His Father, Jesus said in John 17:4: ***“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.”***

Confession Time

We practice open communion, which means you don't need to be an Edgewood member to participate, but you do need to be a born-again believer.

Our deacons and pastors will distribute the trays by passing them down each row. When the tray comes to you, simply lift a cup straight out. You'll notice there are two cups stacked together. Give a little twist and hold one in each hand until everyone is served so we can partake together.

BTW, all the bread is gluten free, and we use grape juice instead of wine.

Distribution of Elements

Forever family, before we take the bread, let's focus on these words from 1 Corinthians 11:23-24: ***“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”***

Before we drink from the cup, consider these words from 1 Corinthians 11:25-26: ***“In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”***

New Members – Richard and Cindy Willard (Saturday night)