

Shining Like Stars
Philippians 2:12-18
Rev. Brian Bill
February 22-23, 2025

Last Saturday night, I gathered here to give God praise through the music and the message by Pastor Kyle.

On Sunday, I traveled to an underground church where I witnessed winsome workers caring for newborns, and trained teachers pouring into toddlers. I observed earnest adults giving the gospel to young girls and young boys. I celebrated as junior and senior high students asked deep questions about eternity while loving leaders took them to the Bible for answers.

In one of the underground adult classes, I heard a teacher celebrate multiple answered prayers and I observed a platoon of men on mission who were encouraging one another and holding each other accountable. I walked into another room at the end of a long hallway where believers were gathered around tables earnestly praying for Muslims to come to faith in Jesus Christ. I stuck around as they were challenged to go with the gospel to unreached parts of the world as they learned that the easy places have already been reached.

I was really moved by this experience as the lyrics to the song “He Reigns” played on repeat in my mind.

*It's the song of the redeemed,
Rising from the African plain.
It's the song of the forgiven,
Drownin' out the Amazon rain.*

*The song of Asian believers,
Filled with God's holy fire.
It's every tribe, every tongue, every nation,
A love song born of a grateful choir.*

*It's all God's children singing,
“Glory, glory, hallelujah, He reigns, He reigns.”*

*Let it rise about the four winds,
Caught up in the heavenly sound.
Let praises echo from the towers of cathedrals,
To the faithful gathered underground.*

Let me share where this underground church meets so you can gather with them or become part of the teaching team that shares the gospel with young image bearers. The directions are pretty easy. Simply exit the south doors of the Worship Center, walk about thirty feet and take the main staircase to our lower level and you will find these beloved believers gathered underground!

We're in Philippians 2:12-18 today as we continue in our "Journey to Joy" series. Here's our main idea: *It's time to work out what God has worked in you.* I see six challenges in this passage.

- Live it out.
- Let it go.
- Light it up.
- Lean into it.
- Lay it down.
- Laugh it up.

1. Live it out. We see this in verse 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."*** The word ***"therefore"*** links us back to what Pastor Kyle taught last weekend: *The only remedy to no longer live for ourselves is the gospel of Jesus Christ.* We move from exhortation, to example, to expectation. In short, the beliefs we learn must be lived out in our behavior.

Notice the next phrase: ***"...my beloved..."*** I love how Paul treats the Philippians. They have problems with pride, they're dealing with disunity, and two women are in a big fight, but Paul calls them his beloved believers. He picks up on this theme again in 4:1: ***"Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved."*** After highlighting their reciprocal relationship, he affirms their commitment to obedience: ***"...as you have always obeyed."*** This is an example of *"catching someone doing something right."* Paul affirms them for what they've been

doing even though he is absent from them, while encouraging them to take their next step.

The next phrase may unsettle us: “...**work out your own salvation.**” We don’t work “for” our salvation, or “toward” it, or even “at” it, but we are to work it “out.” The word “**work**” means to “*work fully to the point of finishing the job.*” It was used for “*working a mine*” completely, getting out all the valuable ore. Likewise, we are to mine the depths of our rich redemption. At salvation God deposited a wealth of blessings into our lives; we’re to go down deep to experience and enjoy what we’ve been given.

The phrase “**fear and trembling**” helps us see we must never take our faith lightly or tritely. As Paul Tripp says, “*Humans are hardwired for awe.*” “**Fear**” describes fright or terror and reverential awe. We must have so much reverence and respect for God that we will be afraid to sin, coupled with a strong desire to please Him. That’s what Exodus 20:20 states: “...**that the fear of Him may be before you, that you may not sin.**” If you find yourself sinning all the time and not really being bothered by it, it could be because you’ve lost your fear of God.

Isaiah 66:2 tells us we’re to tremble when we approach God’s Word: “**But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.**” Psalm 2:11 brings both fear and trembling together: “**Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.**” We’re to revere God and rejoice in Him.

When we contemplate our lostness, our deep depravity, and our inability to save ourselves, we can’t help but tremble at the thought of getting what we deserve, which is eternity in Hell. That should lead us to live accordingly and worship Him fully as stated in Hebrews 12:28-29: “**Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.**” We must get serious about our salvation and as God’s redeemed, we must live responsibly.

Verse 13 needs to be read with verse 12. The reason we can work “out” our salvation is because God has worked salvation “in” us: “**For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**” God’s work involves two aspects:

- **God works in our will.** God first moves our desires to become aligned with His. We see this in Ezra 1:1 when *“the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.”*
- **God works to make us work.** After redirecting us, He gives us the might to do what is right.

God empowers our desires, and He gives us the energy to do what He wants us to do. He alone makes us willing and able, and He does all this for **“His good pleasure.”** God sanctifies us for our good, but ultimately, He does it for His glory. The phrase **“good pleasure”** expresses the idea of *“great enjoyment”* and *“satisfaction.”* One pastor puts it like this, *“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”* Your growth in sanctification brings God great satisfaction.

God energizes our efforts so we will desire His pleasure and do His purpose. One pastor says it well: *“God’s will is being worked in us for His glory. As we work out our faith, God will do a work in us so that He can do His work through us.”*

These two verses, when taken together, teach the biblical truth that we are responsible to do what we can do, and at the same time, God is sovereign and in control of everything. We can only *do* because of what God has *done* in our lives. We can work it *out* only because God has first worked it *in*.

God equips us to want to do His will, and He works in us so we can do His will. He empowers us to do what He is asking us to do.

It’s time to work out what God has worked in you.

2. Let it go. Let’s ponder a few questions. Do non-Christians see us as worshipers or whiners? Are we perceived as kind or are we considered cantankerous? Why are evangelicals so often depicted as angry? Are we known more for what we’re against instead of what we’re for? Do people understand your political fervency but don’t have a clue about your personal faith? Do others refer to you as a sour saint or do they smile when they hear your name?

Verse 14 is one of the most challenging verses in Philippians: **“Do all things without grumbling or disputing.”** The word **“do”** is another word that

emphasizes energy and effort. It's an imperative and the tense of the verb indicates it's a job that's not yet been completed. Notice this covers ***“all things,”*** which refers to every situation, every place, every inconvenience, and every irritation. In the original, it's emphatic and reads this way: *“All things do without grumbling or disputing.”*

I'm reminded of the woman who walked into a department store one day and was surprised when a band began to play, and the manager handed her a bouquet of flowers along with a crisp \$100 bill. She didn't know it, but she was the store's one millionth customer. Television cameras zoomed in, and a reporter started interviewing her. The first question she was asked was this: *“Tell us, what did you come here for today?”* She hesitated for a moment and answered sheepishly, *“I was on my way to the Complaint Department.”* Likewise, many Christians spend a lot of time in the Complaint Department.

“Grumbling” is the low toned murmuring and muttering we do against God and others which often takes place at an emotional level. The word literally means, *“A secret displeasure in the heart, and a sullen discontent that leads to criticism.”* One pastor tells of a lady in his church who complained that the church was baptizing too many people and making the water bill too high. I'm so grateful that would never happen here as we're all thrilled that 14 people are taking the plunge this weekend!

I don't often quote Greek words because it's difficult enough for me to speak English, but in this case, this word sounds like grumbling or complaining, like “hiss” or “hum” or “murmur” in our language. Let's say it together: *“Gongusmon... Gong-geese-moan.”*

When I attended the underground church this past Sunday, I visited a classroom of young disciples who were challenged not to grumble like the Israelites did. Their whining led them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. The teacher asked if I wanted to hear how complaining sounds to God and how that contrasts with praising. Here's a brief recording of these young women illustrating the difference.

Play Audio Clip.

The Israelites were known as grumblers and spent a lot of time at “Camp Complaining.” For these complainers, whatever God did, it was never enough

for them. When God provided manna, they started moaning about it. When He gave them quail, they questioned whether He cared for them. Psalm 106:25 equates grumbling with disobedience: ***“They murmured in their tents, and did not obey the voice of the Lord.”*** Incidentally, the solution to a spirit of grumbling is to submit to the sovereignty of God. We see this in Jude 16: ***“These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires...”***

In Numbers 16, Korah and his cantankerous cohorts complained about their leaders, but Moses knew they were really going after God in verse 11: ***“Therefore it is against the LORD that you and all your company have gathered together. What is Aaron that you grumble against him?”*** As a result of their mumbling and grumbling, over 14,000 people paid for their protest with their lives. James 5:9: ***“Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”*** As Romans 9:20 asks, ***“But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?”***

Israel’s stumbling led to grumbling, which resulted in God’s judgment because all grumbling, whether directed at people or problems, is really against God.

“Disputing” in Philippians 2:14 is what happens when our complaining spills over into conversations, when our misery seeks to manipulate others to comply with our complaints. People in that culture often argued contentiously. I guess some things never change. Disputing takes place when our complaining moves from our heart to our heads and then vomits out of our mouths.

A husband and wife were both complaining against each other, which led to an intense argument. They tried to find a solution, but nothing seemed to work. Finally, the husband said, *“Let’s start over and pretend I’m just getting home.”* He stepped outside and when he opened the door, she said, *“It’s 8:30 at night and you’re just now getting home?”*

Let me quickly mention some reasons why we need to cauterize complaining from our lives.

- **Complaining denies God’s sovereignty.** Every time you complain about your situation, you are really saying, *“If I were God, I would do things differently.”*
- **Complaining disrupts unity because it leads us to criticize others.**
- **Complaining leads to a negative outlook on all of life.**

- **Complaining releases cortisol, which can raise blood pressure.**
- **Complaining is contagious.**
- **Complaining discredits our testimony.**

Once we live it out and let it go, we'll be able to light it up.

3. Light it up. Verse 15 says: *“That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among who you shine as lights in the world.”* The word *“that”* can be translated as, *“so that.”* We'll stand out when we worship more than we whine, and when we do more proclaiming and less complaining.

Notice how Paul described the world he lived in, which is not that different from the one we live in today. The word *“crooked”* is the root word for *“scoliosis”* which means bent or warped. *“Twisted”* refers to that which is perverted. We don't need anyone to convince us about the warped and twisted condition of our culture today. Depravity, decay, and death are everywhere. It was the same in Jesus' day according to Matthew 17:17: *“O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you?”*

Are you willing to swim against the tsunami of relativism, reductionism, and redefinition of terms? When we do, we'll bring light to a dark world. I can think of at least four ways we can respond to our crooked and twisted world:

- We can **isolate** by spending our time in holy huddles.
- We can **indulge** and imitate those around us.
- We can **incinerate** lost people with our attitudes and actions.
- We can **illuminate** the darkness by shining and sharing the Word of God.

The first three responses lead to the loss of our witness, but illumination leads to communication. Lights are valuable only when they are used to dispel the darkness and point the way. Look at the last part of verse 15: *“...among whom you shine as lights in the world.”* Believers are to be bold and bright, shining examples of God's grace. When we refuse to complain, we'll stand out and we'll light up a dark and depressed world.

Do you know when stars shine their brightest? It's when everything is at its darkest. It's not easy to see stars in the sky when the city lights are on but when you go out in the country, you can see a zillion stars lighting up the sky. I have

never seen anything brighter at night than when I laid on my back in Zimbabwe, looking up at the stars and the moon.

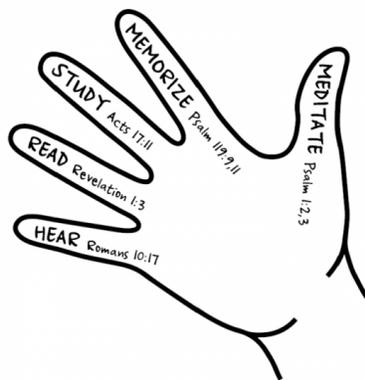
We have been created to reflect God’s glory. When people see Christians complaining and arguing, or when they observe our anger towards the atmosphere in our culture, they’re frankly not very interested in having anything that we have. But, when we shine the light of Jesus, they will be attracted to the Son.

Charles Spurgeon said it well: *“But to shine as lights, we must add the open testimony of our words. I will not give a rusty nail for your religion if you can keep quiet about it.”*

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4. Lean into it. We can only live it out, let it go, and light it up to the extent we lean into God’s Word. Verse 16 tells us we’re to shine but we’re also to share. We must live it and then we must give it: ***“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.”*** The phrase ***“holding fast”*** means to *“present, or to offer a cold glass of water to someone at a banquet.”* The picture is of one who is holding tightly to truth and holding out the gospel of life to those who are in desperate straights. We’re to hold fast to the Word and hold forth the Word to others. We must appreciate the Bible, we must appropriate it, and we must apply it.

Think of the five fingers of a hand representing different ways for us to lean into the Word.



Paul “works” at this, as he uses the word **“labor.”** We must live the Word and give out the Word. This is in the present tense, meaning we’re to do it continually, all the time. Paul makes it clear that he does not want to labor **“in vain.”**

5. Lay it down. One reason Paul was able to rejoice is because he laid his life down in verse 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. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.”** Paul has poured himself out for people, spending everything to further their faith. Notice how he links sacrifice and service. God wants us to be sacrifices first and secondly to serve. He doesn’t want occasional acts of service; but instead demands our very lives.

The word **“pour”** means to pour out an offering as an act of worship. This was a potent image to the first century believers. In the Book of Numbers, worshippers were told to offer an animal, then a grain offering, and finally a drink offering. As wine was poured on the sacrifice, the hot coals would immediately vaporize the liquid, leaving a sweet aroma behind. The steam symbolized the rising of the offering to God.

I appreciate the insight of Got Questions: *“The pouring out of a drink offering is a metaphor for the blood Jesus spilled on the cross. Jesus spoke to this directly in Luke 22:20 when He instituted the New Covenant. He picked up a cup of wine and said, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.’ Jesus’ sacrifice fulfilled the need of a drink offering, His blood literally pouring out when the soldier pierced His side with a spear.”*

Paul is saying that his life is like this final sacrifice. A similar phrase is used in 2 Corinthians 12:15: **“I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.”** Here’s what he said at the end of his life in 2 Timothy 4:6: **“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come.”**

This past weekend marked the tenth anniversary of the brutal beheading of 21 men who were dressed in orange jumpsuits and forced to kneel on a Libyan beach before being martyred for their faith. To learn more about this, I recommend watching a new short film, which is only 10 minutes long, called “The 21,” which shows how these men poured their lives out as drink offerings before the Lord. While twenty of the 21 were Egyptian Coptic Christians, the twenty-first was a Christian man from Ghana, who was also captured by Isis

during a separate raid. When given the opportunity to be released, he refused, saying that the God of “the twenty” was his God.

The entire group of 21 were given numerous opportunities to be released. Like millions of martyrs before them, all they had to do was deny Christ and they would be spared. Over weeks, they were beaten, deprived of sleep, and worked until exhaustion. In the end, they were martyred one at a time. ISIS hoped that at least some of them would deny their faith after seeing what was done to the others. None did. As the film says, “*all died with the name of Jesus on their lips.*” You can watch it for free on YouTube. To learn more, go to The21Film.com.

Sadly, intense persecution is still happening in the world today. A little more than a week ago, 70 Christians were discovered beheaded in a church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, Islamist militants have killed at least 89 other believers just this month.

It's time to work out what God has worked in you.

6. Laugh it up. We see in the last part of verse 17 and verse 18 that the best antidote to grumbling is to be glad in the Lord: “***...I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.***” The words “joy” and “rejoice” are used 16 times in Philippians. This joy only comes as we sacrifice all to the Savior and live lives of servanthood.

I had a joyful experience recently which brings all this together. Many of you know that I lost my voice a couple weeks ago. When I called my doctor, he ordered a prescription and asked me to take my first dose that evening. When I went to Walgreen's I saw that there were about 25 cars in the line at the drive-up, so I decided to go inside the store. When I walked in, I was shocked to see the end of the line went all the way back to the freezer section next to the Photo Department. I said a quick prayer, asking God to help me not mumble or grumble and looked around to see who God might want me to have a conversation with.

God gave me an opportunity to chat with the guy in front of me for 45 minutes (did I mention the line was long?). We talked about a lot of things, including the gospel. I gave him a copy of *Anchor for the Soul* and *Soul Satisfaction* and

invited him to church. He and his girlfriend came the following Sunday, and attended again last weekend.

On Wednesday, I met them for lunch at Vibrant Coffeehouse and told them I couldn't stop thinking about them and wanted to share the gospel with them. As I explained how much God loves them and how their sin was keeping them from Him, I noticed tears running down their cheeks. When I communicated that Christ died for their sins and was raised from the dead, they were all ears. When I urged them to believe and receive, they both said they were ready to do so. In the middle of a busy noon hour, they bowed their heads, repented of their sins and asked Jesus to save them!

This gospel opportunity happened only because the Lord helped me not complain about the long line. In fact, the Lord used this line as leverage for His purposes.

Let's go back over our outline and rate ourselves on a scale of 1 to 10 in each of these six areas.

1. Living it out. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2. Letting it go. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3. Lighting it up. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4. Leaning into it. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5. Laying it down. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
6. Laughing it up. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Invitation

Closing Song: Christ Be Magnified

Membership

Saturday at 5:00

Pam Harrison

Sunday at 9:00

Lynn and Kelley Jackson

Alex and Amy Lambert

Destiny Rottman?

Sunday at 10:45

Brent Nielsen and Lesa Behrends

Jace Elerick

Sena Taylor?