

Shine Like Stars

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[0 : 0 0] Well, all right. Good morning, everybody. As Alex said, my name is Elliot. I'm one of the pastors here. So good to be with you at City Grace Church as we move forward today in a series that we are doing from the book of Philippians.

And we're going to be continuing in a passage where Paul is encouraging and challenging this church at Philippi. And, you know, one of the things that just really stands out about many of Paul's letters, and this letter as well, is you don't have to look too far to see how deeply he cares about these churches that he's planted.

It is so obvious that he has both a deep joy in them and just like a really heavy burden for them that they would continue to flourish in Jesus.

And so in this passage today, he's going to continue in that strong encouragement that they keep reaching towards Christ, and they keep doing the things that draw them near to him, and they keep fighting the things that pull them away.

And the reason for that is that Paul has this really unshakable commitment to encouraging people and exhorting people towards personal discipleship.

[1 : 0 9] And frankly, it's one of the reasons you hear us talk about it so much. I would even go so far as to say, and this might be a bit of a bold statement, but I actually believe that the quality of this church, or really any church, is largely defined based on the commitment of every person in it to personal discipleship.

Leaders, partners, commitment to be the hands and feet of Jesus. So, you know, there's a lot of stuff I love about the community here at City Grace, and one of the advantages of being a pastor is you get to hear a lot of the really encouraging stories and what the church has meant to people.

And to be sure, like I really love it when people comment kind of on the external things, like, hey, we really like the vibe you've created here. We like how you do worship. I love it when people notice kind of the special care that the welcome team takes to like make things beautiful or make people feel welcome.

I love it when people say they're thankful for like how much they appreciate the kids' ministry and, you know, the thoughtfulness we put in that. I appreciate when people comment on what the teaching or the preaching means to them.

And again, all of that we do try to take great care in doing. But by far my favorite thing is when people comment on what the community and the people around them have meant to them.

[2 : 3 7] Like when people say things like, I never really had a church community like this before. Or when someone says something like maybe their job or their life circumstances are pulling away and they'll say, you know, the hardest thing about leaving this place is the relationships that we've made here at this church.

And the reason I love that the most is not because we're the only church that does that. It's not something where it's like we're better than everybody else at it. We do strive toward it.

But the reason I love it is because to whatever degree people are feeling that, right? To whatever degree people are feeling loved and cared for, I think it's just a really good indicator that we as a body are on a personal level committed to being the hands and feet of Jesus.

It means we are trying to love each other well. And Paul today is going to show us that's right where you should be as a church. And that's how you're going to show the world around us who Jesus is and what his kingdom is like.

And in the midst of that, he's going to warn us about a few things that can kind of get in the way of it. So without further ado, we're going to jump in. We're going to pick up in Philippians chapter 2. We're going to start with verses 12 through 18, and then we'll hit the later verses later in the sermon.

[3 : 52] But picking up in verse 2, he says, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. And do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. And likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

This is God's word to us. So Paul has this longing for personal discipleship, and he actually gives us a picture of what it looked like.

Paul tells us that in a lot of ways, personal discipleship is the working out of what God has worked in. Now notice like we have in previous pieces of this letter, that this working out of your salvation is present tense.

[5 : 17] We are not working out or working on the finished work of Jesus in redeeming us. We are not trying to work on being made holy from our sin and from the penalty of our sin.

Our redemption is faith in what Jesus has done plus nothing. But as we have seen before, this present tense version of salvation does tell us that Jesus is actively saving us from the power of sin as well.

Like day by day, he is making us more and more like him. And thankfully it also tells us God's at work in that too. It says that God, by his spirit, is working in you.

He's working to help you want the things you should really want. He's working in you to have a will that can be set to do the good things he puts in front of you.

And that's really key because what that means is personal discipleship isn't just some human discipline. Like it isn't just you bearing up that I'm going to do this.

[6 : 24] It is a divinely empowered process. It means that we are actively relying on God to be sowing into us by his spirit the fuel we need to do this.

But it does also tell us we have a role to play as well. And Paul is going to give us some markers in this verse of what that would look like and what to avoid.

But before we even get to that, I think it's helpful to note that he actually gives you the attitude by which you should approach it. And he says, we should approach this with fear and trembling.

That's a good question to ask. What does that even mean? Like what would that look like? Because on the one hand, it's really clear from Scripture that God's heart for us is not to like cower in a corner afraid of him.

Like over and over in the Scripture, Jesus points to him as a loving father. God constantly reminds his people, Old Testament and New Testament, of his mercies and his compassion.

[7 : 27] Jesus invites people close to be a friend. That is a picture of like the most intimate and safe place you can be with the God of the universe. But we also know from Scripture that God is overwhelming.

Like, and frankly, he can't be anything else. Like when you're God, you are just overwhelming. Like, and so in some ways, there's always going to be this sense of fear we have that's just in awe of his majesty.

Like his glory is so unapproachable that it will take your breath away. And again, you see that throughout Scripture when somebody encounters glimpses of his glory.

Maybe it's God passing by Moses. Maybe it's an encounter with an angel. Maybe it's an encounter with the risen Jesus. Like when you see his glory coming through, people get scared.

Like they're overwhelmed and terrified. And I would say in some ways, those things feel like they're almost contradictory, right? Like, because most human relationships, frankly, don't work that way, right?

[8 : 30] Like how could you ever, like the person you feel close to and comfortable with, the person you feel like you let your hair down with is not often the same person you feel intimidated by, you know?

Or you feel like maybe like you would your boss or something. And so I think it's kind of hard to see what that picture is and what that would even mean for the process of like working out salvation.

And I don't think there's really any one metaphor that can fully get at it because, you know, he's God and that's a special type of relationship. But the closest thing I could come up with that I thought would be helpful today is sort of the experience of having a child, right?

So for those of you in the room who are parents, I'm sure you remember well, whether it was a long time ago or just recently, the flurry of emotions and things that come in when you're bringing new life into the world.

And there are like so many moments of that that can only be described as joy, right? Like you've gone through this labor and this trauma of bringing the child in and now you're holding the child in your hand.

[9 : 33] There's those moments of closeness where, you know, you're just, there's kind of quiet moments there in where you've given delivery in the hospital room where it's just like you and your family and you realize like how important just this moment is.

Like you're introducing these new humans to their grandparents. You're giving them a name. All these blessed things, right? Like it is a joyous time and it's about as intimate as it gets.

But I think most parents would agree there's often also this moment, particularly with your first child, where you're simply just struck by the weight of what it means to be responsible for another human.

Like you are hit with the reality of, wow, this child depends on me. That happens in a lot of ways.

I think for me and I think for a lot of people it's like this. For me that really moment happens like when you're leaving the hospital, right? And you've kind of got this baby and you're just sort of like, I mean, for real? Like we're just going to take this baby home, right?

[10 : 36] Like no adult supervision? I guess we got it. You know? Good luck, baby. That's how it feels.

Like you work out being a parent with fear and trembling. Like there has to be a seriousness to the weight of the responsibility you've been given.

Like you have a strong desire to do the best you can because you realize whatever I do, it's going to have a huge impact on this human, on this child and what their life is going to look like.

And so, look, I personally, I think if you're going to be a follower of Jesus, I really do think the place you have to start is just falling into his grace. Like I feel like you have to be able to know the love of Jesus.

Like you have to see his merry heart towards you as the foundation of discipleship. Because if you only feel scared, like if you only ever can see or you feel like all God sees is your lack, like you're never going to feel safe in his arms.

[11 : 45] Like you can't know the joy of the Lord like that. And I believe, again, just the foundation, the fuel has to be knowing that his love is greater than your weakness. That he is the place you can trust.

That he does know how to sympathize. But we also do live our lives before a holy God and we can't be flippant about that. There is a weight to the responsibility to work out your discipleship.

Because whether you want it to or not, your life matters. Whether you are committed to following Jesus or not matters. And much like a parent, I don't think a healthy way to approach that weight is to let it cripple or paralyze you, right?

Like you can't be in a place where you're so scared you're going to mess up. You never do anything. Like, yes, you're going to mess up. But I think what it should drive you to do is say, you know what, I know God loves me.

I know I can never turn him away. I know his glory is unsearchable. And I know what I do matters. God, give me the grace to do it well. It drives you to that prayer.

[12 : 56] So what does it look like if we do that? Well, Paul says one of the markers of doing this well is that personal discipleship always works itself out when nobody is looking.

Now there's a theme in a lot of Paul's letters where he's really concerned for the church that he's planted. Where he says, you know what, you were running such a good race while I was with you, and now it seems like you've started to struggle.

Like someone's come in and distracted you, some sin has distracted you, and like Paul's longing is that they will be committed not just when he's there, but when he's not around, like not just when the preacher's looking.

Paul wants them to have the type of discipleship that happens when no one's watching over their shoulder and when there's no glory in it. And Jesus says something very similar in Matthew 6.

He says, He wants you to be committed to it when there's no praise to be given.

[15 : 00] Jesus tells you that real discipleship cares only about one thing. What does God think? And he says God will see that.

And if we can do that, if we can get into that mindset, I think it's really helpful for discipleship. And I also think it's really helpful for the next thing that Paul says, which is a pretty stark command.

He goes on to say, Personal discipleship also steadfastly resist complaining. Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

Some versions say do everything without complaining or arguing. So now look, I'll be honest. As a leader or an elder in the church, this is actually one of my least favorite things to preach on.

Because even though this verse is very much intended to speak to all of us, it talks about how all of us deal with each other in our relationships in the church.

[16 : 03] The truth is, whenever it comes from a leader in the church, and I'm standing up here telling you, you need to resist complaining and arguing, there's a certain level where it's hard for that not to come across as, hey, quit your grumbling and quit voicing your opinion and just do what I tell you to do.

And indeed, that rings true because I'm sure many of you have seen that happen in a church over the years or maybe have experienced that. And it's unfortunate that sometimes that's the way it is. Like it's completely possible a leader could use this admonition to kind of squash any honest critique under the guise of we shouldn't be grumbling with each other, right?

So to whatever extent you trust me as a leader, let me just say that is not the intent. It is simply the next verse in Philippians. So if God hits you with something today, that's between you and him.

Like I got no axe to grind. I got no hidden agenda. But that being said, it is really important we take this to heart because there are few things that will kill a church fellowship faster than complaining or grumbling or gossiping or arguing about stuff.

And it gets even more stark where like, so if you actually look at this construct of this text in the Greek, how this passage is laid out, it's really obvious that like Paul isn't just saying this.

[17 : 26] He is alluding clearly to the language from Deuteronomy 32, which is then also mirrored in 1 Corinthians 10, where it's talking about how Israel as a people, when they're in the wilderness, are grumbling and complaining against God.

Like that's the comparison he has for doing that in the church. And while we don't have time to unpack all that, and I would certainly encourage you to go like read all about Israel's exodus from Egypt if you never had.

But to briefly summarize it, their complaining and grumbling is viewed as so serious and offensive to God that in Numbers chapter 14, he basically resolves that what they deserve is to die in the desert.

And Moses intervenes and asks for mercy. And God gives it. He says, okay, you'll live. But he says, here's the deal. Not one of y'all is setting foot in the promised land.

Their complaining and grumbling and dissatisfaction, like they're fighting to get this exodus to look like they want it to on their terms, is so offensive that it basically excludes an entire generation from seeing the fruit of what God was meaning for them coming out of Egypt.

[18 : 46] It is not that far from Egypt to Canaan. And they spend a long time doing this out in the desert. Serious.

So how do we fight it? I think probably the most straightforward thing to say is, you start by simply resolving that you do not have to have your way.

That the question you want to ask is, Jesus, what do you want? And this is one of those things where, again, like, I don't have time to outline all the things I don't mean by that, right?

Like, it certainly doesn't mean you never add your voice to a conversation about a topic. It certainly doesn't mean you can't have preferences, or you have to like everything about any church context you're in.

And it certainly doesn't mean that you don't get to speak up if you think something is wrong, or like a gospel issue. What it does mean is that you resolve that you don't have to have influence and control to be content.

[19 : 48] That's not a prerequisite for you being content. It means when you walk into any situation, it doesn't have to be 100-100 like you want it to be for you to feel part of the community.

You know, it's kind of an insider joke in church circles where we talk about, like, churches that have fallen apart over silly things like, what color is the carpet going to be?

Or, hey, we're thinking about adding another instrument to the worship band, and it is so easy to, like, look at that or look at a congregation that that's happened to and said, man, how silly, how silly of them to do that.

But the problem is, those type of things always start in the same heart. I'm frustrated about something I don't like, and I want to let everybody else know about it, and I want to find others that have that same sentiment.

You know, what we really want to do here is try to build a community where we don't move towards grumbling or complaining. Our move is towards kind of courageous engagement.

[20 : 51] Like, a place where, if you can imagine it, where you feel safe enough to give honest feedback, to, like, actually say how you feel and not feel like you're going to offend somebody.

To be able to say something like, hey, you know what? That's not my cup of tea, but I love that Jesus is going forward. Like, if you're someone who runs a ministry or oversees something, like, where you feel secure enough that you're not devastated.

If somebody wants to tell you about something that they think could be different in it, or if somebody doesn't share the same passion as us, we don't get upset about that. We could only do that.

Like, we could only have that kind of community if we're committed to personal discipleship. Honestly, to be committed like that, I would say what you have to have is a rock-solid trust that you don't have to scratch and claw to get what you need because you trust that Jesus will give you what you need.

Like, you're not worried about taking care of yourself because you know Jesus sees you and He's got your back. Like, you are confident that I don't have to fight to secure whatever I need to feel secure.

[22 : 01] Jesus has got me. And Paul says that's the attitude. That's a thing we need to do in all things. And he tells us if we do that, we will actually in the process see something else that's pretty amazing.

Paul says those committed to personal discipleship will actually shine like stars. Do all things without grumbling or disputing that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God, without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights.

Some places say shine as stars in the world. You know, one of the primary purposes that Jesus tells His disciples that they have in the world is simply to shine as lights, to bring light to the world.

He actually says that, again, in Matthew chapter 5. He says pretty plainly, You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but they put it on a stand so that it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. That means whether you want to be on display or not, Jesus says if you follow Him, as you do the good works He gives you, that He puts in front of you, you will shine like stars in the darkness of the world around you.

[23 : 33] And Paul in Philippians says, I mean, he says it really clearly, when you refuse to act like the world, when you refuse to scratch and claw to get your way, and when you refuse to live a life of self-centered complaining and grumbling, and when it is obvious that you have your eyes on something bigger and better than your own needs, it stands out like the brilliance of stars against the night sky.

You could feel that all kinds of ways if you think about what stars do, like they give light to help you see, they give beauty, like there's something that reminds you of the depth of there's more to this world.

They're used for navigation, they're like a fixed point you can use to help you in life. Jesus says that's what the Christian community does for the world. And that kind of maturity and love, that kind of community, if you can become it, just naturally invites people in.

It's like a warm blanket. And that's what we want to strive to be. Like we don't always get that right, but we want to. And then in the last part of chapter two, Paul shows us one more thing about that kind of life.

He says a life committed to personal discipleship will be eager to give honor to others. Paul continues this letter really just by showing us how it's done.

[24 : 55] He says in Philippians 2, 19, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be cheered by news of you.

For I have no one like him who will genuinely be concerned about your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not of Jesus Christ, but you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father, he has served me in the gospel.

And I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me. And I trust that the Lord, that shortly I myself will come also. I've thought it necessary also to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to me in my need.

For he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death, but God had mercy on him and not only on him, but also on me, lest I should have had sorrow upon sorrow.

And I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that seeing him you may rejoice and that I may not be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

[26 : 12] A quick side road here, this is actually one of the things that I love about scripture. Like this is one of the things I love about God, how God has chosen to make his word known to us.

I mean, if you think about it, if you thought about like how an almighty God, if he was going to pass along stuff, he was going to choose to pass along stuff in written text, how he might do it.

And I don't know what you might imagine, maybe it would be like some very detailed like instruction manual for life, but I actually think it's great that he uses all these different genres and styles of writing and all these different experiences of people, some of them very important and wealthy, some of them very poor, from different eras to weave this story and tell the same thing.

And that means that like right here, it's really cool that what we're seeing is God's word and to give us his word, he's not just telling us to honor people, he is using an actual letter that was written to actual people to give them honor and show us how to do it.

And so Paul just kind of elaborates, you know, one of the things he wants to make sure the Philippians know before he sends Timothy is how he feels about Timothy. And notice again how he describes him like it's the exact opposite of self-centered complaining.

[27 : 32] He says, I have no one else like him because everyone looks out for their own interests, but Timothy has a genuine concern for you and a genuine concern for Jesus.

He also makes sure sure to hype up Epaphroditus who, so Epaphroditus is the one that the Philippians had sent to minister to Paul. He's actually the occasion for this letter being sent back.

Remember, they had heard that he was in chains and so they send him to find out his state and he comes with a gift and we don't know exactly what that is, but we know it is a balm to Paul and like he really just wants to make sure that they know how much he has meant to them.

And not only that, what he has suffered that he nearly died in accomplishing this mission and so when he sends them back, he wants to make sure that they know he did that and he frankly wants to make sure that they give him a hero's welcome.

He did everything that he was sent to do and it meant the world to me. You know, we say this a lot and I think it's true that in a lot of ways following Jesus isn't easy.

[28 : 48] I mean, in many ways it is probably the hardest thing we do in life simply because it means fighting against your own sin. It means fighting your own nature and sometimes even your own interest to be a follower of Jesus.

But even though it's easy, I would say many times just because it's not easy doesn't mean it's not simple. It does not take a prodigy in ancient text and you don't have to be some savant at theology to know how to follow Jesus well.

Sometimes it really is as simple as this. Let the people around you know how much they mean to you. Tell the people in your lives and in this church how much you appreciate them.

Celebrate people publicly when they're not expecting it. It's simple but if we committed to doing that over and over like what would it look like if we committed to showing that kind of honor when we're in season and we feel like it and we're out of season and we don't.

What kind of people would we be? And how might God use that in Newbern? How might He use that in the city and the places around us? So simple mission simple prayer.

[30 : 12] Even so Lord Jesus give us the grace to do that. Amen. So as the band comes up today a couple of ways to respond.

You know if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus I'm not sure what your experience of church or the people in the church has been but I just want to tell you what we saw in this text is what God intends it to be.

A community that doesn't only think about its own good but the good of those around them. A community that's committed to something more glorious than our own glory.

But here is the secret sauce. We can't do it without Jesus. It's to whatever measure we do something good it is not because we've come up with a great system or we have a good creed or we have the right morals like that stuff is going to fail at some point.

Like the secret sauce is that we believe we know the literal son of God who helps us every day. It's because every day day by day we believe our flaws and our failures are swallowed up in his mercy.

[31 : 24] And if that sounds like something you want we would love to tell you about how to know him. There'll be some pastors down front we'll also have a prayer on the screen that might be a way you want to express that.

If you're here and you are a follower of Jesus so maybe this is a day that you have recognized in yourself the tendency to focus on everything that's broke and the tendency to complain.

And if that is you I would say take heart because you can repent and turn to Jesus and he will forgive you every time. Jesus pricks your heart about something it's not meant to be a condemnation or to damage you it's a gift just to turn your heart back to him and every time he'll help you be more like him.

Maybe this is just a day this feels like there might be a stream of this here today to just grab someone and give them some honor like make sure the people around you know how much they mean to you and so maybe while you're sitting here and letting God examine your heart maybe he'll put somebody on your heart put somebody in your mind that you want to do that I would say just do it like go and it's never a bad thing to grab someone and let them know hey did you know that my life is better and happier because you're in it and I just want to take the opportunity to say that to you so if God moves you in that way go get with that person now or after the service and just let them know that for those of us who follow Jesus we're coming to a moment of communion too so after you've let God examine your heart you come to the communion table you take the bread and the cup back to your seat it's just a moment to remember that Jesus is as close as breath he's the one that abides with us he's the one that makes this possible maybe as

Jesse said today it's a moment to say God speak something over me God likes doing that too you know he actually likes speaking blessing into our lives so let's give this moment to him father this entire moment is yours you know what is needed your spirit knows what is needed and so we turn over this to you this whole moment is yours God work in the hearts of your people what is needed I ask in Jesus name heard