

“Work Out God’s Work” Philippians 2:12-13

Anybody enjoy music? Song was woven into the fabric of creation, so at a fundamental level I believe everyone enjoys music. I didn’t graduate from Berklee or the Conservatory, but I know that one aspect of any great song is the rhythm that moves a song forward. The pace, the tempo, the beat, the thump, the strum, the bass...

This is how I used to justify listening to some explicitly suspect music as a teenager. “I don’t care about the lyrics, I just like the beat.”

Rhythm pushes a song forward and rhythms push our lives forward. What kind of rhythms do you have established in your life?

Get ready... Breakfast... Do you go to the gym... Walk your dog when you get off work? _____ Any routines when you tuck the kids into bed at night?

We all have rhythms of daily living, and God wants us to establish some healthy rhythms that will enhance our spiritual lives. Just like we try to brush our teeth and eat 3 meals a day, so we should also establish healthy spiritual disciplines in our lives. We like to call these rhythms of grace.

Today I want us to examine Paul’s words in Philippians 2:12-18 and consider what it looks like to ...

The Point: Work out God’s work by cultivating rhythms of grace.

Look at *Philippians 2:12-18*

I. Discipline yourself through rhythms of grace (2:12).

Paul started the church at Philippi. He was thankful for how they were following hard after God, taking his teaching to heart and growing in their faith, but wants them to continue since he is no longer with them. So he says...

“Work out your salvation”

- Given the holiness of God.. (Shouldn’t be hard to grasp if God exists) and given the sinfulness of man (shouldn’t be hard to grasp if you watch the news or look in the mirror, ouch!), life’s greatest question is how we can be reconciled to God and be saved?
- Two fundamental answers: “Work for it” or “Receive it.” One is earned; the other, a gift.
- Paul *is not* saying, “Work for your salvation” It’s not as if God does his part, and then we do our part to earn heaven. The Bible clearly says that salvation is a gift, never to be earned by works. **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)**
- I believe the language of verse 12 actually argues for salvation by grace. How? Because you cannot work what you do not possess.

To grasp Paul’s words, we have to understand the difference between Justification and sanctification...

- **Justification** happens when God gives us grace to trust in what Jesus did for us on the cross. We receive forgiveness of all our sin debt, and God **counts us righteous** in him. Justification **frees us from the penalty of our sin.**
- **Sanctification** is the process of progressively **becoming more righteous**, more like Jesus. So

whereas justification frees us from the penalty of our sin, sanctification **frees us from the power of sin** in our lives.

- Verse 12-13 cover sanctification.
- To work out our salvation means to actively seek spiritual maturation. It means developing the character of Christ as he continues to save us from, not just the penalty of our sin, but the power of sin in our lives.
- Consider this: Hebrews 1:3; Col. 1:15 – us? Like him!! God won't relent until it happens. "Same image." (2 Cor. 3:17-18) That's a miracle. And that miracle is taking place by degrees every single day. So our call is to "act the miracle!" – John Piper

How do we act the miracle and work out our salvation?

- It is a picture of activity.
- You will hear people say: "Just let go and let God." That can be dangerous counsel.
- Here's why: Yes, we should trust God. Yes, we should release control and cast our "anxieties on him" *BUT even then* we have to continue trusting, praying, and setting our minds on Christ.
- There is never really a time we completely let go of our responsibility to act.
- On the contrary we **WORK**.
- The word translated "work out" refers to "continuous, sustained, strenuous effort." (O'Brien)
- It does not simply happen. It's drops of sweat running off our brow day by day, moment by moment, thought by thought, decision by decision.
- We must discipline ourselves in grace. The healthy rhythms we build into our lives to make us spiritually strong are often called "spiritual disciplines."
- Just as physical exercise promotes strength, wellness, and vitality, so the spiritual disciplines promote spiritual strength, wellness, and vitality.
- Some of the disciplines include: receiving God's Word, prayer, fasting, service, giving, and regularly meeting with other Christians in worship and community to name a few.
- **"God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us." – Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline***
- They are habits of devotion, NOT legalistic rituals. Legalism is earning our way to God's favor. Ritual is doing what we do without substance. Ritual is empty action.
- They are habits of devotion because at their highest they are with "fear and trembling," with a deep sense of reverence and awe before the presence of God.
- **"Train (discipline) yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." (1 Timothy 4:7-8)**
- This does not happen overnight. You think the guys working out at Gold's Gym get ripped by tiptoeing around and picking up 5lb. dumbbells a couple of times a month? No! They are in there multiple times a week, some every day, busting out mad sweats, veins popping out everywhere, throwing up massive amounts of iron. It takes effort and consistency!
- *AND there is immense value here. Present life and the life to come.*

Are you getting consistent spiritual workouts? Bible reading and prayer and serving and sharing and dwelling in community will get you fit and keep you fit.

T: But listen: there is a danger. As we pursue these disciplines and obey God's directions for our lives, we can quickly do so in our own strength. That is why it says "work out" FOR "it is God who works in you." So, number 2...

II. Depend on God's work in you to produce Christlikeness (2:13)

Read 12c-13

- "We work out our salvation with fear and trembling *precisely because* God is working in us." – D.A. Carson
- We work because God is working.
- The disciplines are not the source of grace and strength in our lives. God is the source. He simply works through the disciplines.

Perhaps you doubt God can work in you and change you, or maybe you don't really see a need for these disciplines of grace.

- If you are prone to fall into either one of those camps (which we all are at some point), listen to the words of Jerry Bridges who says: **"Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace."**

God works in us as we work out in two primary ways. Number one.

1) God works new desires in us.

- "to will" This is the level of our motivation and will.
- It's not enough to know what we should do, if there is not a desire to see it happen.
- It all starts at the level of desire. We need God to give us new and better desires.
- "The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is through the explosive power of a new one." – Thomas Chalmers
- What happens when we don't desire God?
 - Pray: Ask!
 - Discipline yourself. Place yourself under streams of grace.
 - Why don't I desire God? Well, oftentimes, I would say the vast majority of the time, it is because our love has grown cold toward God and we have moved away from him. BUT when we worship together, open the Bible, go back to God in prayer, take our eyes off ourselves and serve someone, then all of the sudden, that fire is rekindled
- Not only does God give us new desires, these new desires lead to obedient action.

2) God works new actions in us.

- "to act" This is the level of our doing.
- God gives us the energy to enable us to do the very thing he commands us to do. Love your neighbor. Speak words that build up your co-workers. Set aside anger, self-centeredness, lust, discontentment.
- **"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." (Colossians 1:28-29, ESV)**
- When we wake up tomorrow morning, February 13th, we can have confidence and put our spiritual hard hats on knowing God delights to give us desires that line up with his desires & the strength to walk in his ways.
- **There is a tiny poem that captures this attributed to John Bunyan, the author of the great literary classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, "Run, John, run. The law commands But gives neither feet nor hands. Better news the gospel brings; It bids me fly and gives me wings."**
- **Justification is a gift of grace, AND sanctification is a gift of grace.**

At this point you may be asking (you probably should be asking): "How do we hold these together, God's work and our work, working out while God is working in?"

- Jerry Bridges has a potent two word phrase that I hope will get burned into our minds and hearts: **“dependent discipline.”** We need both, like two wings of a plane: always dependent on God’s grace working in us & always disciplined to work out our salvation as we walk with God daily.

Let’s pause and return to the first word of the paragraph: We have to see that all of our action, all of our obedience should happen because of and through the obedience of Jesus.

- “Therefore...” Jesus was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (5-11).
- Our obedience is motivated by his obedience.
 - Why do we love?
 - Why do we serve?
 - Why do speak kindly when blasted by others?
 - Why are we generous?
 - Why do we forgive?
 - Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus.

Trans: There are major ramifications as we cultivate rhythms of grace!

III. Be motivated by the results of dependent discipline (2:12-18).

Everyone who works out knows the value of healthy motivation. This section is loaded with motivators!

a. We will be changed (12-13).

- We are pursuing gospel renewal, the power of the gospel transforming our lives in clear and evident ways. We may think it comes through an extraordinary set of steps or circumstances, but those who study spiritual renewal tell us God does extraordinary things through ordinary means of grace.
- This is what Tim Keller says in his book *Center Church...* **“Gospel renewal or revival is an intensification of the normal operations of the Spirit (conviction of sin, regeneration, sanctification, assurance of grace) through the ordinary means of grace (preaching the Word, prayer, and the sacraments).”**
- Now, if this is true in individuals, what would it take for a church to experience gospel renewal? a large number of Jesus people experiencing personal gospel renewal.
- Got it? If we want to see renewal on a wide scale (if we want to see our church empowered by God and making a difference in our city), we need the Spirit to work through the ordinary means of grace in an intensified manner, so that many Jesus people are hungering after God, pursuing holiness, sharing the gospel, and making sacrifices that the kingdom may advance in us and through us.

Trans: what else happens when we cultivate the rhythms of grace? What we just talked about . . .

b. The church will be changed (14).

- In verse 14, we see some practical examples of what it looks like to work out our salvation as God works in us. Paul says, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.”
- All things.
- Grumbling is so easy. A little complaint here. A little complaint there.
 - If you’ve been reading the Bible through in the Old Testament, we see this. God’s people are prone to complaining. Thanks for delivering us out of slavery in Egypt, but we’re hungry. Thanks for the promise of a new land, but we’re probably going to die at the hands of our enemies.
 - Grumbling reflects ingratitude before God and a lack of love toward our brothers and sisters.
- As the context reminds us, grumbling can quickly disrupt unity in the church.
 - I can’t believe they Did you see the way she... If he would have made a better decision... I

- can't believe I'm not getting my way. This is not fair...
- Listen: we will let one another down, intentionally or unintentionally. We will always have room to improve and mature as a church. Let's do "all things without grumbling and complaining."
- Can I share an observation with you over the past few years? Complacent complainers (complain but don't work toward change); Constructive unifiers.
- Classic example: well, I can't find community in this church... But you haven't checked out a group? You show up late and leave as soon as the service is over. ☺ And while you expect everyone to know your name, you've never introduced yourself to learn someone else's

T: We work out our salvation so we will be changed, the church will be changed, and...

c. The world will be changed (15).

- Verse 15 . . . *"So you will shine like stars!"*
- When we cut off complaining and follow God's ways by "holding fast to the word of life" (which is why we need to consume it frequently), we will shine as lights in the world."
- People will take notice and be pointed to a better way.
- As we shine, it enhances our ability to live the invitational life (1 each month, right? Cover the map, right? Lehhgo!)

Conclusion

To conclude our time together, let me give you two more motivators.

d. We can boast of God's work through us (16-18).

- When we see one another growing in Christ, it validates our sacrifices for one another. We can see God has used our time, energy and investments to make a difference.
- It brings joy across the board.

Most importantly, more than us being changed or our church being changed or our city being changed . . . God receives the glory.

e. And God will be glorified (13).

- Everything in our life is for his glory. This is why we exist; and it is why this church exists...
- Look back at verse 13 one more time: "FOR HIS GOOD PLEASURE"
- Everything we do is done for this reason!

Let's take some time to pray for one another to work out our salvation as God works in us, through rhythms of grace and dependent discipline, all for the pleasure of our great God. (Pray).

Steps Change Stories??