

PHILIPPIANS
CHAPTER 1

PROCESS

CHAPTER 1:1-8

I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6 CSB

We don't always get things right, do we? Sometimes we say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing or just act in the wrong way. I cannot tell you how many times that happens to me. Sometimes it feels like the flaws within are just too much. It feels like everyone else is getting it right, but me.

Verse 6 has a beautiful promise in it. It is a promise that we will never be abandoned or thrown away. One that embraces the process, because the process is always continuing. As stuck as we might feel sometimes, the truth is, God starts a good work in us and He will carry on with that work as long as we are willing.

This good work starts the second we say "yes" to following Him. That moment sets forth the process of sanctification. Sanctification is a fancy word for "to set apart for special use or purpose", that is, to make holy or sacred. From the moment we enter into a relationship with God, He starts the process of setting us apart. He starts to make us holy.

The scriptures say in 1 Peter 1:16 that we ought to be holy because God is holy.

Holiness kind of feels like an unattainable measure. And to a degree, it is. We are flawed humans who all fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). But once we are justified by God's grace in the moment of salvation, our sanctification process begins. The process whereby God can refine us to look more and more like Him.

Yes, we will get it wrong and sometimes we might fail the test. But He will continue the work He started in us for as long as we are willing to partner with Him in it. Our good Father will not abandon us or leave us halfway. He does not treat us the way we treat that half-finished DIY project gathering dust in the back of the garage. God does not give up on us. He does not toss us aside when things get difficult. No, He is faithful to complete the work He started in us.

Paul starts his letter to the church in Philippi with this amazing promise. A statement to soothe every inner critic. Feeling like a work in progress is normal. Feeling like you still have so much work to do on the inside, is most certainly a normal, human feeling. If you experience that from time to time, you are in good company, I promise. No one truly arrives this side of eternity. That's not to say that we give up and stop doing the work of sanctification. It just means that we get to be extra grateful for a gift like grace that covers our weaknesses.

God will continue to build us; He is the potter and we are the clay (Isaiah 64:8). He never throws us from the potter's wheel as an incomplete lump of clay. God will keep molding and shaping until we take the form He intended. There is always hope in the process. God is not done with you yet.

Reflections

Take a moment to ask God if there is an area of your life where hopelessness has taken a hold of you.

Ask Him to show you what He is building in that area of your life, to show you His perspective.

LOVE

CHAPTER 1:9 - 11

And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more [displaying itself in greater depth] in real knowledge and in practical insight

Philippians 1:9 AMP

Paul writes that his prayer is that our love would abound more and more, and that it should be displayed in greater depth.

I love the imagery. Our love needs to grow down into depth - think of the root system of a tree. The more a tree grows, the deeper its roots are. As the roots start to grow, the ground breaks open and something starts to surface. What is happening underground is starting to become visible, “displaying itself” as a tree in the process of growing.

Love that goes deep looks like something. Heidi Baker, a missionary and leader of Iris Ministries, is a good example of someone who lives this message. She has often said that love has to look like something. That is why they not only pray for the blind to be healed, but they also build schools for the blind. They not only lay hands on people, but they provide safe places and meals for people as well. Jesus models what real love looks like - laying your life down for your friends (John 15:13). It’s not lip-service, it is action. But it doesn’t stop there. Depth *is* needed, but our love also has to grow

in knowledge and discernment. Imagine these as the branches of the tree. Now that the roots are in place and the ground is broken open, the tree starts to develop branches, leaves and fruit.

Discernment and knowledge helps us to see rightly. It helps us to hold on to the good and discard the bad. The Amplified translation expands on the idea of becoming pure and blameless when we hold on to what is good, saying: “actually living lives that lead others away from sin.”

What an amazing perspective to have. The deeper our love goes, the more visible it should become to those around us. And along with that visibility, we can now better see what we ought to treasure and what perhaps needs to be discarded. In that process, our lives are putting Jesus on display, leading others away from sin. It’s not just about us. Throughout the book of Philippians, Paul puts an emphasis on our consideration of others. Even within our own personal growth, others should be considered. Your sanctification process is not just about you, but about every person you are going to impact through the fruit of your life.

Whenever you find certain words in scripture, it’s important to pay attention to what happened before, and what is about to happen after. We find one of these in the middle of these passages. The words: “so that”. It is basically a way of saying to us, that, if all the things I just mentioned are in place, then the next thing I’m about to say should be the effect.

Our love grows in depth, knowledge and discernment, resulting in the ability to see the good and embrace it; to lead lives that honor God and lead others away from sin. It cultivates a righteous character in us.

So, if you find yourself in a space where you are struggling with any of the above, remember to always circle back to love.

We need depth, knowledge and discernment. The way we practice growing in these things is simple:

1. Spend time in God's Word to expand on knowledge and discernment. It's hard to be faithful and obedient when you are unsure of what you ought to be obedient to.
2. Remember that your life is not just about you, it is also about others. This helps us keep perspective and focus on the things that matter to Jesus: His people.

Reflections

Take a moment to ponder where your love-levels are at? Do you feel like you are currently growing in depth, knowledge and discernment?

Depth - does it get easier to love the difficult people in your life as time goes on? Or do you feel stuck in the same place?

Knowledge - do you know what God's heart is for you? Is it easy to figure out what His will would be in a certain situation?

Discernment - do you find it difficult to assess what truly honors God? Do you find it easy to know when something like a certain habit, behavior etc. should be embraced or discarded?

If you feel like you are getting stuck at any one or even all three of these points, ask God for one thing you can do today to help you cultivate and be filled with the fruit of righteousness as mentioned in verse 11. Go through each point and ask Him for input on one thing you are struggling with currently.

TESTIMONY

CHAPTER 1:12-14

And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

Philippians 1:14 NLT

The book of Philippians is a book centered around perspective. We start to really catch a glimpse of this from verse 12 onwards.

Paul has a perspective marked by joy. Something that may have been less impressive had he not been writing this letter from his prison cell. Prisons in those days were a lot more grim than they are now. In Paul's day, prisoners had no rights. They were kept in chains and dark dungeon-like rooms for indefinite amounts of time. It would be completely understandable to find yourself in a circumstance like that and struggle to see the proverbial "silver lining."

However, Paul models a perspective we all tend to struggle with at times. How do you and I view our present struggles as something that could be good? How do we remain optimistic even when the chains feel tight and the cold prison doors seem like they will never open?

We can learn a thing or two from the apostle Paul. If you look closely, you will notice that he takes the focus entirely off of himself. He focuses on two specific things: the gospel, and other people.

Paul's imprisonment leads to the gospel of salvation being known all throughout the imperial guard. It becomes a great conversation starter for anyone who doesn't know what has happened yet, and over and over again the message of Jesus gets proclaimed. Our hard moments are springboards for us to take our eyes off of our circumstances and to focus on the narrative of Jesus throughout.

The Bible is quite clear: when we look for Jesus, we will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13). Even in our toughest circumstances. Sometimes, the things that happen are just so awful, and so unjust, that it is hard to imagine anything good coming from it. I remember a story breaking in South Africa in early 2010. A gospel artist and his wife were held up at gun point and the woman ended up being raped by the assailants. The story made headlines.

Even bigger headlines came days after the incident though. "Gospel singer's wife forgives rapist" was plastered all over the lamp posts. This woman had a perspective beyond her circumstances. She later wrote a book explaining just how incredibly difficult that time was. She had a long road to recovery. But through her traumatic experience, the gospel of Jesus was preached. The gospel of the forgiveness of sins, even the most awful ones imaginable, was being heard by people who had never heard it before. Even in the greatest injustices and hurts in our lives, the gospel can be made known.

Paul also mentions how his imprisonment has given others the boldness to speak even more, spreading the name of Jesus even further than before.

The things that happen to us are never really just about us. Have you ever looked at someone who has been through a lot, but still remains joyful and

thought, “wow... So is it possible? I want some of that!” You spend time with that person, or you read their book or hear their story and it almost feels like an invitation for you to do the same.

The woman I mentioned before had a similar experience. On the one hand, she received much criticism for her forgiveness; on the other hand others were really challenged and encouraged to start their own forgiveness journey.

Remembering that everything that happens to us is not just about us gives us a broader perspective. It reminds us to not be so consumed with the things that are happening *to* us, that we forget about the positive ripple effect that could come from it. Perhaps the trouble you are facing at work is something God could use to reach one of your colleagues? Perhaps you will have an opportunity to share how God has carried you and provided for you with someone who really needs to hear it?

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

- Romans 8:28 ESV

That is a profound promise found in scripture. All things work together for our good. All things.

It might not always feel that way, and that is okay. It is okay to have to wrestle through certain things. What is important though is that we keep perspective. We remain focused on what God is doing in us and through us, in the midst of whatever happens to us. And even if it feels like there is nothing good, let us not forget that He is near to the broken-hearted and close to those crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18).

I don't know about you, but I can't imagine anything more amazing than the knowledge that our Father is close.

Reflections

Take a moment and think about an area where you have struggled to have the optimistic outlook as Paul does.

When you think of an area or perhaps a few, ask God what His perspective is and make a note of it. Remember, God's perspective is never hopeless or negative. He is our source of endless hope and optimism.

Once you have God's perspective, ask Him for something practical you can do to start to shift your perspective to align with His.