

Finding God's Peace in Tumultuous Times: A Pandemic Devotional from the New Testament Book of Philippians

Devotional 2

March 27, 2020

by Rev. Dr. Kent R. Walley

Procrastination. I know a thing or two about procrastination. I have experience with this. There is nothing like a deadline to enable me to get things done (at the last possible moment of course.) I thought about joining the Procrastinator's Club of America, but never really got around to it. (Not really, but there actually is such an organization! It's motto: promoting "the philosophy of relaxation through putting off until later those things that needn't be done today.")



Now you may not be a great procrastinator like me, but do you have some things that you keep thinking "some day I will do that"? Some day I will start a diet and exercise regimen. Some day I will take up that hobby. Some day I will clean up the

spare room. Some day I will spend more time seeking to get right with God. Many of us have those things we've thought about doing but never really get around to starting. Maybe your procrastination involves something you started but never completed. Perhaps you started a book or a project of some kind, and then stopped, thinking I will finish it later.



As we are all shut up in our homes, with so many of our normal activities on hold, we have more time. Have you been able to make use of this time to do some of the things you had put off doing? What on your some-day-list involved growing in faith

and drawing closer to God? Have you taken advantage of the time to take on this most important pursuit?

The opening verses of Philippians create a wonderfully rich passage that talks about so many of the things that really matter. Paul talks about love, thanksgiving, joy, grace and peace to name a few! And Paul talks about the work of God in each of us. He writes: "I am confident of this, that the One who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." (1:6) Paul is urging the Philippians to realize that the work that God began in them when they came to faith is not yet complete. He is working in them still. Though the Philippians are facing some challenges in life as they seek to live out their faith in a culture that is quite hostile to the way of Jesus (as we learned in Acts 16 last week), Paul assures them that God is not done with them yet. God has not stopped working. And God's timing is always perfect. God never procrastinates. God knows just when to do something. ("When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman." Galatians 4:4).

As you read this passage from Philippians chapter one, can you find the faith to believe that whatever the challenging circumstances you face are, that God is not done with you either? Can you believe that He is at work, and though we may long for Him to act more quickly -- on our timetable -- His timing is perfect? Can you hear Paul's words to you? He who began a good work in you (God has begun a work in you!), will be faithful to complete it. He will see you through. Seek to know that as you go through this study today.

Read, Reflect and Apply** – Ask God to speak to you and listen!

**Questions preceded by two asterisks indicate application relevant to your life.

Read Philippians 1:1-11 and then consider these questions.

Verses 1-2

Learning from Paul's Example

*Who wrote this epistle? How do they describe themselves?

Servant – a servant in the ancient world was “owned” by another, dependent on that other and lived life in service to that person. This is a tough concept for us in the 21st century, because we have horrid images of abuses done to slaves in colonial America. It was not quite so awful in the first century. The potential for freedom was greater and slaves tended not to be dehumanized the way we have seen done in our recent history. Slavery is not good, and Paul is not justifying it here. But Paul is using this concept to express his choice – to serve God – to surrender willingly, to acknowledge that he belongs to another, is dependent on that other, and seeks with his entire life to serve that other.

******Could you describe your relationship with God this way? Would you say you are a servant of God, a willing slave of God? Why or why not?

*****Who are the recipients of this letter from Paul and Silas? What categories of people are described? Why do you think Paul refers to them as “saints”?

Saint – is the same root word as ‘holy’ – it means ‘holy ones’. And holy means to be set apart, to be set apart from the world for God. Saints in Biblical usage are those set apart from serving the world and themselves, to be dedicated to serving God.

******In what ways do you feel like that kind of a saint, someone set apart from the world for God? In what ways do you find this difficult?

The Power of the Apostolic Greeting

*****Consider how Paul greets the Philippians in verse 2. The words are familiar in Christian parlance but try to listen to them as if hearing them afresh, or for the first time. What is Paul intending to communicate in this greeting?

*Consider “grace” and “peace”. They are two common Christian words. Two words we might easily take for granted. They were each a standard greeting in the ancient world. But Paul takes the word used for the common greeting, “grace”, and changes the grammatical form, loading it with new meaning. Grace is a free gift – it has been described as “**G**od’s **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist’s **E**xpense”. This means that God has given us a free gift of His love and forgiveness by means of the cross. But sometimes grace is described in the New Testament almost like a commodity, as a kind of spiritual jet fuel. Paul talks about being filled with God’s grace, overflowing with grace, and a grace that fills us with gifts in the Spirit. (See Ephesians 4:7, 1 Tim 1:14, and all the epistles where Paul closes with the words “grace be with you”.)*

Peace in Hebrew is “Shalom”. This is intended to convey the desire for the person being greeted to have “wholeness” and “well-being” from God.

******For what might you need God’s grace right now? In what sense are you feeling the need for His peace as so described?

Verses 3-11

The Example of Paul’s Prayer

Paul begins by talking about his prayer life.

*****What two attitudes dominate his prayers for the Philippian Christians? Why does he feel this way as he prays?

*****What do you think he means that they share a “partnership in the gospel” with him? In what ways are they partnering with Paul in Christ?

******Do you think Paul would have the same feelings of thanksgiving and joy about you and your spiritual growth? Would he rejoice at how you are partnering with him in the gospel in your location, as he does for the Philippians? Why or why not?

****How often are your prayers categorized by joy and thanksgiving? How could you grow in being more thankful, more joyful, and supporting, witnessing and standing in solidarity with other Christians for the spread of the gospel? Try to be specific.**

Paul's Relationship to the Philippian Christians

***How does Paul describe his relationship to the Philippian Christians? Why do you think his feelings for them are so strong?**

***Why might Christians' connection with one another in Christ grow such strong feelings of connection with one another?**

****Can you relate to Paul's feeling for the Philippians during this time of social isolation? Who are you longing to see? Perhaps you might pray for them with thanksgiving and joy and then write to them about your prayers and how you are feeling – just as Paul did.**

God's Work in the Soul of the Believer

***What work has God begun in the Philippians? What is Paul sure of?**

****What work has God begun in you? Can you hear these verses for you as well? This is Spirit-inspired Holy Scripture. Paul wrote it to the Philippian Christians then, but this message transcends that time and circumstance and is also relevant to us now. Try listening for the voice of God to you and read verses 3-11 again. Every time you come across the word "you" – hear that as directed specifically to you! Can you hear this assurance? Can you believe that God is working His good soul-strengthening purposes in you? Can you find encouragement that God desires these things for you in your life today as well?**

The Example of Paul's Intercession

***What does Paul pray specifically for the Philippians?**

***What is the danger of having love without the wisdom of knowledge and discernment? What crazy things might be done out of love, having negative unintended consequences because of not really seeing or knowing the situation of the person?**

****Who needs your prayers to abound in love and knowledge and discernment? Who needs your love?**

Closing Prayer

As you close in prayer, ask the Lord to fill your heart with joy and thanksgiving. Ask the Lord to put those on your heart who need your prayers and your love. And thank the One who began the good work in you, that He will be faithful to complete that work that He started in you.