

How Then Shall We Live?

Philippians 2:12-18

The Journey of Joy in Christ

A Series in the Book of Philippians

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The Christian life can be likened to learning how to sail. You have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and you are “in the boat.” You want to move forward, but how do you actually grow? Why do some believers thrive in their faith while others seem to stay tied up at the dock? That’s the very question Paul addresses in Philippians 2:12–18: How then shall we live? Just before this, in verses 5–11, Paul gives us one of the most breathtaking portraits of Christ in all of Scripture. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who existed from eternity past, entered humanity, embraced the role of a servant, lived a perfect life, bore God’s just wrath for our sin, and is now exalted with the name above every name. This is a theological diamond of the New Testament that emphasizes Christ’s humility, sacrifice, and lordship. Now Paul turns from Jesus Christ’s essential nature and finished work to our response, showing us some of the most practical and powerful principles for Christian growth. Here is the gospel truth: anyone who turns from sin and trusts in Jesus Christ is permanently united with Him, adopted into God’s family, redeemed by His blood, and made a child of the King forever. And so, the question naturally follows: How then shall we live?

How then shall we live as people united with the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ?

- 1. We live with a new priority** **2:12**

Paul begins by reminding us that because Christ humbled Himself and is now exalted (Phil. 2:5–11), believers are to respond in active obedience. The Apostle begins this practical passage by calling them “beloved,” and reminding them of their shared history of faith and love in Christ. Obedience, Paul says, is central to discipleship and occurs by placing ourselves under God’s word and living in submission to Christ. Just like sailing, we hoist the sails and steer the rudder, but without the wind, we are powerless. So too in the Christian life, we actively engage yet remain utterly dependent on the Spirit. That is why Paul says, “work out” your salvation, which translates the Greek word that means to put something into effect entirely or thoroughly. It has the idea of continually carrying something to completion. This word, translated as “work out,” was used to describe the process of extracting ore, such as gold, silver, or bronze, from a mine. In context, it carries the sense of mining out the treasures of salvation in Christ. He does not mean “work for” salvation, which is impossible because it is God’s free gift by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8–9). Believers in Christ are to engage in the ongoing process of discovering, delighting in, and displaying the riches of our eternal relationship with Him.

This is the picture of the Christian life. God has already deposited incredible riches in us through Christ, such as forgiveness, a new identity, freedom from sin’s power, His indwelling presence, spiritual gifts, growth in Christlikeness, and the hope of eternal glory. These treasures are already ours. Our calling is to mine them out, to bring them to the surface through obedience, faith, and daily dependence on the Spirit so that the world sees the beauty of Christ in us.

This priority must be done “with fear and trembling,” which is a reverent awe of our holy God. To live this way is to walk in humility, with a sensitive conscience and vigilance against sin, desiring to honor

the Lord in all things. Through the gospel of grace, God calls us to the priority of learning about and living out the riches of our salvation with reverence and joy.

2. We live with a new power 2:13

Paul reminds us that while we are called to discover and reverently reveal the riches of our salvation (v. 12), we are never left to do this in our own strength. In fact, verse 13 assures us that God Himself is at work in us. Sanctification is not simply a matter of willpower or human effort, but the result of the Spirit's ongoing, empowering presence. The word Paul uses for "work" (*energeō*) gives us our English word "energy." Just as electricity gives life to appliances, so the Holy Spirit energizes both our will and our work. The Holy Spirit does not merely stir in us a desire to please God; He also supplies the power to carry it out. If we could see the invisible inner working of God with our eyes, it would take our breath away.

God Himself is at work to shape our desires and empower our obedience. This divine empowerment fosters both humility and confidence. Psalm 127:1 reminds us that without the Lord, our labor is in vain. Paul himself testified in 1 Corinthians 15:10 that while he worked harder than others, it was God's grace working through him. And in Colossians 1:28–29, he described striving "according to His power, which mightily works within me." God's ultimate goal is not our comfort but His good pleasure as His glory displayed in us. That means obedience is never impossible, even when it feels overwhelming, because God Himself is fueling both our desire and our strength. The risen Christ not only saves us but lives in us, shaping us into His likeness and accomplishing His will and work through us. We who believe live with a new power because God is at work within us.

3. We live with a new purpose

2:14-18

Paul demonstrates that living with a new purpose starts with a commitment to God's holiness. Believers are called to live "without grumbling or disputing," refusing to adopt the world's language of complaint and discontent. Grumbling and arguing are not small matters; they damage unity within the church and destroy credibility before the watching world. Instead, we are called to be blameless and innocent, children of God who are quick to confess sin when we fail. In a crooked and perverse generation that twists morality and celebrates sin, Christians are called to shine as lights that are distinct, pure, and radiant testimonies of Christ and His gospel in a dark world.

To fulfill God's purpose in our world requires a dependence upon God's word in our lives. Paul exhorts the Philippians to "hold fast the word of life," clinging to Scripture as central, essential, and life-giving. Just as a wick fuels a flame, so the word fuels the believer's light. We must appreciate it as God's unique revelation, appropriate it into our lives as our spiritual nourishment, and apply it in daily living. Paul's great joy was not in personal achievement but in seeing God's people walking in the truth. Likewise, if we are to shine brightly, we must anchor ourselves in Jesus Christ and the Bible. Let the word of God shape your way of life. God uses the regular practice of appreciating, appropriating, and applying Scripture to shape our convictions and character by His truth.

Finally, a life of purpose is characterized by devotion to God's people. Paul describes his ministry as a drink offering being poured out for the sake of the Philippians' faith and joy. His example shows that true joy is found not merely found in comfort or self-preservation but in sacrificial service. Everyone pours their life into something, but only a life poured

out for God and His people produces eternal joy. When believers embrace joyful sacrifice for one another, they reflect Christ's self-giving love and shine His light in the world. Where there is love for God and people, there is light for the world, and that light brings glory to Christ. As Paul teaches in Philippians 2:12–18, being united with the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ transforms the way we live. We now live with a new priority: mining out the riches of salvation by living out the life we have in Christ with reverence and diligence. We live with a new power, confident that God Himself is at work within us to shape our desires and empower our obedience. And we live with a new purpose, shining as lights in a dark world, holding fast to the word of life, and joyfully pouring ourselves out for others. When we live this way, the world cannot help but see Christ in us, and by this, He is glorified.

We shine the life of Christ as we live out our faith in Christ.

Passage Investigation: Prayerfully engage with the passage by reading it multiple times. Ask, “*What is this saying?*” and “*Why did God have this recorded?*” Look for the natural, normal meaning of the words and phrases and identify the meaning in context. **Write down your observations** about what the passage reveals about God, Christ, His kingdom, humanity, sin, the gospel, trials, and faith. Ask key questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Let your investigation lead to a deeper understanding and love for God and His word.

LIFE Application: Questions for our journey of joy in living out the LIFE we have in Christ (Loving God, Investing in others, Following His word, and Engaging our world)

1. Paul commands us to “work out” our salvation, not “work for” it. The original word conveys the sense of mining out treasures that are already within. What “treasures of salvation” has God already deposited in your life, and what practices help you draw them out and develop Christlikeness day by day?
2. How can cultivating a holy reverence for God (“fear and trembling”) change the way we approach daily decisions, relationships, or struggles with sin?
3. Philippians 2:13 says God is the one “who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” How have you seen God energize both your desires and your actions in recent months? What would change in your life if you truly trusted that His Spirit is empowering you right now?
4. Why do you think Paul makes such a strong point about doing “all things without grumbling or disputing” (v. 14)? How does complaining damage both our personal witness and the unity of the church?
5. What practical habits help you to “hold fast” to God’s Word so that it fuels your life like a wick fuels a flame? What simple steps can you take this week to deepen your intake and application of Scripture?
6. Paul describes his life as a drink offering poured out for others (vv. 17–18). What does it mean for us to pour out our lives for God’s people joyfully? How can we encourage one another to see sacrificial service as gain, not loss, and the path to true joy?