

# GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL GOD SERMON SERIES

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

29 & 30 MAY 2021

### WORKING OUT IN THE LIGHT

Scripture: Philippians 2:12-16, 1 Timothy 4:8-10

Overview of this series:

The general intention of this sermon series is to encourage us to see and experience our God who is good and beautiful, even in times of darkness. The sermons and study guides will suggest a Spiritual Workout that is intended to help us be attentive to God's goodness and beauty in daily life at work and at home.

In this session, we look at the gift of salvation and the gift of being able to work out our salvation.

The recommended time allocation for your group meeting is:

**If you meet weekly :**

- Worship through song (10 mins)
- Discussion - 1 session worth of core questions (40 mins)
- Discussion - 1 session worth of additional questions (30 mins)
- Sharing, Prayer, Fellowship (30 mins)

**If you meet fortnightly :**

- Worship through song (10 mins)
- Discussion - 2 sessions' worth of core questions (60 mins)
- Optional - additional questions (10 mins)
- Sharing, Prayer, Fellowship (30 mins)

### Core Questions for Discussion

(If your group meets fortnightly, combine Core Questions of two sessions and choose one Further Question from either session.)

### Philippians 2:12-16 passage breakdown

Context	
- v1-5 - v6-11	v1-5: People of the gospel having the same mind, same love, united in spirit, with one purpose → the attitude Christ Jesus had to others in obedience to God v6-11: Hymn/poem of Jesus' gospel mission
Observation	
v12-13	Working out our salvation with fear and trembling because God works in us.
v14-16	Holding fast to God's word of life as lights in the dark world.

**1 Read Philippians 2:12-13. These verses start with the word “therefore”, which usually means that it continues from teaching or thoughts set out in preceding verses (vv.1-11).**

**1.A) List some of the key points in vv.1-11.**

- In vv. 1-11, Paul calls on his audience to be imitators of Christ:
  - “... being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.” (v.2)
  - To look out for the interests of others, to “[do] nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.” (vv.3-4)
  - And emphasising the attitude of Christ for us to imitate in verses 6-11, “Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ... he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”
- The narrative for believers is the foundation that we are to be like Christ (v.5) and be united and humble in our interactions with one another (vv.3-4), in one spirit as imitators of Christ (v.2), enjoying that unity with Christ and fellowship with the Holy Spirit.
- What this means here more specifically: Scripture is asking us to imitate Jesus’ obedience to God’s will (“becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross”). Paul is not commanding Christians to seek physical death, but to be willing to obey God even if such obedience requires great humility - even humiliation, as well as great pain and suffering.

**1.B) In light of those key points, what is the Bible trying to encourage and emphasise in vv.12 and 13?**

- Verses 12-13 are grounded in the model of Christ’s humility and obedience in the preceding section. That is why the word “therefore” is used in verse 12.
- In verses 12-13, Christians are instructed that when it comes to salvation, we continue working it out (bring to effect, accomplish, actualise), because Christ continues to work in us.
- The visible expression of our salvation, as seen in the transformation of attitudes, affections, and actions - these involve hard work, effort, and discipline.
- Such “working out” is **not** that we earn our salvation or to appease the wrath of God. No, we are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ - this is a free gift which comes from God. The working out of our salvation is in

"The exhortation to work out their salvation is not mere idealism but rather viable "because God is working in their midst to will and to do." Were God and his grace not constantly working in the believing community in a powerful way, believers would not be able to obey this command of Paul's. [...] God's willing does not replace or supplant our voluntary willing but enables and increases our willing, power, and freedom to do what God requires. But we must work out what God has worked into the midst of the community. The Philippians should be exhibiting a healthy body of Christ which manifests the saving activity of God in their midst."

- Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, pp.160–161.

response to what Jesus has done for us and is continuing to do. (Note that both “working out” and “working in” are in the continuous tense in Greek, thus describing an ongoing activity).

- Yet, despite our double-mindedness and our oft-wandering-hearts, verse 13 assures us that it is God who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. It is God who works within us to renew and change our inner desires and motivations, what we want and don't want to do. It is God who works in us, enabling us to choose the good and to act and live in ways pleasing unto him.
- That work in us comes from the Holy Spirit, and with the Holy Spirit we should have fellowship (v.1). This fellowship acts as the very foundation for our “working out”. His work in us gives us hope that we can work out our salvation based on what God has done and is continuing to do in us.
- *“As the work of God, salvation concerns both the present experience of ‘being saved’ (1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor. 2:15) and a future and permanent reality. While Christian experience may anticipate it in the here and now, salvation always ultimately relates to the final and transcendent consummation of God’s purposes for the world (1Thess. 1:9–10; Rom. 13:11). [...] It is God who saves—but there is a human responsibility to take hold of that salvation, as even Phil. 3:12 makes clear (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24; 1 Tim. 6:12). [...] Rather like Christian citizenship (1:27; 3:20), salvation is realized both in receiving it and in working it out, taking an active share of responsibility for its implementation.”* - Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, pp.151-153.
- TLDR / Summary:
  - Because God has worked and continues to work in us the gift of salvation, we can together work out (live out) our salvation with humility and reverence before God.

Let’s ponder:

**Why does the Bible use “work out” to describe our Christian lives?**

- Because Christianity is not simply a belief but a way of life. And living out our faith involves individual and communal responsibility to follow God's word on our part.
- This lifestyle of obedience involves a willingness to die to our own misguided wants and desires. This is never easy nor does it come to us naturally. Hence, it does require training, that is, we need to “work out”.
- If this feels stressful, remember where we get the energy to work out: “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (v.13) We are not alone in this, for the desire and power to “work out” is the result of God “working in” us! Thanks be to God!

"Christian ethics has nothing to do with rules that regulate conduct. [...] We are not those who have been begrudgingly caught by God, so that we obey basically out of fear and trembling over what might happen if we were to do otherwise. Rather, being Christ's means to be converted in the true sense of that word, to have our lives invaded by God's Holy Spirit, who creates in us a new desire toward God that prompts godly behavior in the first place."

- Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series, p.105.

**2 In verses 14-16, Scripture indicates that working out our salvation would include being steadfast in several aspects of life so that the children of God can “shine like stars in the universe”. What should we do, and why?**

- The Bible says we should do everything without complaining (grumbling) or arguing (engaging in disputes)
- For John Wesley, this verse prescribes that we
  - “Do all things - Not only without contention (Phi 2:3), but even without murmurings and disputings - Which are real, though smaller, hindrances of love.” -John Wesley, *Notes on the Bible*.
- Complaining and arguing (which are motivated by selfish ambition or conceit/vanity) are a hindrance to love. The Bible warns against these in v.4.
- It may also be said that complaining is an attitude that declines to place thanksgiving as a priority.
- Not complaining or arguing is an indicator of working out our salvation with humility towards others and love for one another; this marks us as a community of God's children in Christ.
  - Complaining and arguing are the sins that breed disunity and thus blur the effect of the gospel in Philippi. They are to do everything without indulging these attitudes, which reflect “selfish ambition” and “vain conceit” rather than the humility that puts the concerns of others ahead of one’s own (v. 3). -Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series, p.107.
- If, as Christians, we fail to live in mutual humility and love, but instead are constantly grumbling and disputing with one another - then we are certainly not being good witnesses to the gospel message, we are not shining as lights of Christ in the darkness (v.15), we are not holding on to the gospel, God’s own words of life (v.16).

**3 Part of working out our salvation, as we have seen in Philippians, entails obedience. In 1 Timothy, another aspect is highlighted. Read 1 Timothy 4:7b, 8-10. What sort of training is Paul encouraging Timothy to participate in? Why do we need this training?**

1 Timothy 4:7b-10, 11-16

Context	
- v1-7a	Paul warns Timothy about false teachers advocating certain spiritual practices which is the “hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared”.
Observation	
v7b-10	Godliness (the Greek word connotes reverence or piety) has present and eternal value (our hope set on the living God); it is why we work hard and struggle
v11-16	Persevere in how you (Timothy) live and what you teach (the gospel); Timothy is a steward of the gospel of God’s salvation

- Paul encourages Timothy to train himself to be godly. (v.7b) Such training has value and holds promise for the present life and the life to come. (v.8)

- Sometimes we expect transformation in our lives to occur simply through our desiring, wanting, or willing ourselves to be transformed. However, here, Paul is saying that training is required and goes on to provide the framework and instructions for Timothy's spiritual workout.
- In the same breath, Paul goes on to say that there is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (v.9) and for which they have laboured and strived for, that they have put their hope on Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all men, and especially those who believe. (v.10)
- As with Philippians 2:12-16, that first anchor is hope in Christ for our salvation, the gift of eternal life. Yet we also have to train in godliness. (v.7b) Training (as in working out) is essential in our spiritual health, holding promise for this present life and the life to come (eternal life).
- What training does Paul advocate? In 1 Timothy 4:11-16, Paul sets out a framework for Timothy: "set an example for the believers" in speech, life, love, faith, purity. Devote himself to public reading of Scripture, preaching, teaching. Do not neglect his gift, given to him. Be visibly diligent so that people can see his progress. Watch life and doctrine closely. Persevere to save both himself and those who hear him.
- Visible transformation in Timothy's life requires spiritual training in godliness.
- There are a few key principles that we can glean from these spiritual workouts Paul advocates:
  - The narrative: we have hope in Christ our Saviour, but we live in this world and we have a purpose in Christ to follow.
  - The spiritual workout: training in godliness, which includes reading, studying, and meditating on Scripture, prayer, etc.
  - The community: our workout involves the community such as setting an example, and visible progress as a form of accountability.
  - The work of the Holy Spirit: enables us through gifts, guidance, guarding (life and doctrine).

**4 In this session, we have explored various aspects of the gift of salvation and the gift of working out our salvation. Consider and share in your small group:**

**4.A) What about the world makes it hard to be godly or obedient? When have you found it challenging to live in a godly manner? (For example, it might be the temptations we struggle with, or the challenges we face at home, at work, in school.)**

**4.B) Living a godly life can be hard work. How can you support and encourage each other, when it feels tough, to persevere in seeking godliness and obedience?**

## Further Questions for Discussion

(Optional question for discussion if time permits. Do allocate adequate time for prayer and fellowship.)

### 5 When you think of the words “fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12), what comes to mind?

What do we understand by the word “fear” used in verse 12?

Φόβος (phobos)

**Thayer Definition:**

- 1) fear, dread, terror
  - 1a) that which strikes terror
- 2) reverence for one’s husband

Should we work out our salvation in fear, terror and dread? Or should we work out our salvation in reverence?

Might there be anything wrong with fear in terror and dread, particularly of sin and disobedience?

John Wesley has said:

“Give me one hundred men who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.” -Letter to Alexander Mather, Wesley’s *Letters* 6:271-2.

At the same time,

“One does not live out the gospel casually or lightly, especially in light of verses 6–11, but as those who know what it means to stand in awe of the living God. Nothing of cringing or lack of confidence is implied. Rather, the gospel is God’s thing, and the God who has saved his people is an awesome God. Thus working out the salvation that God has given them should be done with a sense of “holy awe and wonder” before the God with whom they—and we—have to do.” -Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series, pp.104–105.

And so, we undertake such efforts with fear and trembling, referring to a sense of awe and reverence before God, humbled by the recognition of our frail and fallible human nature.

### 6 Suggested Spiritual Workout: SLEEP-WORKING

For each session in this sermon series, a spiritual workout will be suggested for you to exercise on your own or together as a group. We encourage you to try this spiritual exercise, then share at your next small group meeting how it has impacted you.

Sleep.

Psalm 127:2, the Psalmist states

In vain you rise early  
and stay up late,  
toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves.

## **THE DISCIPLINE OF SLEEP**

(Extracted from *The Good and Beautiful God*, by James Bryan Smith)

At least one day this week sleep until you cannot sleep any more. If you need to, find a day when you can sleep in. Your aim is to sleep, or to stay in bed, until you can finally say, I am completely rested. I do not need to sleep or stay in bed a minute longer. You may need to solicit the help of others if you have family members who need your care.

If you are unable to do this exercise, try another: aim to get at least seven hours of sleep at least three times this week. This may require going to bed earlier than usual. The following are some tips to help you fall asleep:

- (1) Go to sleep at a consistent time each night.
- (2) Try not to engage in activities that increase stress (such as, perhaps, watching TV or spending time on the computer) right before bedtime.
- (3) If you are affected by stimulants (caffeine, spicy foods) avoid them in the evening.
- (4) Do not force yourself to fall asleep. If you do not feel drowsy, read a book, meditate on a psalm, listen to soft music, or sit up and gaze out your window until you do feel drowsy, and then go back to bed. Until your body is ready for sleep, tossing and turning in bed will not work.
- (5) If you awaken in the middle of the night, but do not have to get up, stay in bed. Give your body a chance to fall back asleep.

Even with these tips you might still have trouble getting sufficient sleep. If so, it might be helpful to consult your doctor to see if there is a medical explanation. You could also see a sleep expert for more advice, or perhaps visit a counselor or therapist to see if there is an underlying emotional problem that might be hindering you from sleeping.

## **Prayer Suggestions**

7 Would you consider praying for the following:

- a. Has God impressed on your heart or mind an area of your life in which you have not been “working out your salvation”? Share and pray with one another, that God may work in you in that area.
- b. If you are new to spiritual workouts, would you pray for God to open your heart to experience Him in a fresh way.
- c. For friends and family to have an opportunity to sleep this week. Perhaps you know of someone who has been feeling exhausted and tired. Pray specifically for them.