

IV. Philippians: Rejoicing in the Advancement of the Gospel
“Sanctification: A Life of Keeping in Step with the Lord”
Philippians 2:12–30
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The text for this study is the end of a larger section that began back in Philippians 1:27, with the command in Greek word order would have been ‘only worthily of the Gospel of Christ walk as citizens now. In Philippians 2:12, we come to another bookend command in our section, which begins with, “Therefore.” The first two verses of this section is Philippians 2:12-13 which says, [12] *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*

When we see the word ‘therefore’ we must ask the question, what is the therefore there for? It means we have to look back to the anchor for our command in the section before this which is from Philippians 2:1-11, which contains the great Philippian hymn in Philippians 2:5-11. We looked at this in the previous study where unity for the sake of the Gospel and how Christ is the One we look to as the example par excellence of unity and humility. Think about it. In this hymn we see King Jesus and His humiliation, His humanity – gentle and lowly He comes, born in a cattle trough, born under the law, His perfect obedience, enduring the wrath of God and the cursed death of the cross for sin, buried and under the power of death for a time. But we also see His exaltation rising from the dead on the third day, His ascension to heaven, His session where he rules and reigns, even now at the right hand of the Father and His Father gives Him the name that is above every name – Jesus Christ the Lord. One day He will return to set everything right at the Last Day, where every knee will bow and every tongue will confess the name Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So anchored to Christ’s work. We come now to an outflow in what I believe are two verses of really how our sanctification works. Our life on our sanctification journey can be summed up in Philippians 2:12-13. From the point forward of our election, our calling, our regeneration where the initial moral change in our hearts takes place, what we would call definitive sanctification (Titus 3:5 or I Corinthians 6:11), but you were washed, you were sanctified which is the regeneration that Paul speaking of. Then there is our justification, our adoption by God through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. The rest of our life in Christ is one of a journey, like Christians in Pilgrim's Progress. It's a journey we call progressive sanctification, whereby becoming more and more like Christ, we journey toward an eternity in the celestial city as Pilgrim journeyed towards.

A point that I think is helpful as I have read Scripture, along with establishing context, is what is known as the indicative imperative relationship. In Philippians 2:12-13 we see that relationship played out. Philippians 2:13 is the indicative which means what is true, what is truth, what God does and that is He works in us to will and to work for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12 is the imperative, the command, what we're called to do – to work out our own salvation or sanctification with fear and trembling. We must have both in order to understand the grace and beauty of the Gospel because here's where oftentimes we get it wrong.

If we simply take the imperative or the command of Scripture without the indicative, we turn the Word of God into a license for moralism or legalism, a to-do list of sorts, a list of things to check off in our own strength as an attempt to earn our salvation by works. Yet if we simply

cling to the indicative without the imperatives, as Bonhoeffer calls it, we keep in grace. We live life thinking our ticket is punched without anything needing to change as far as fruit bearing in my life and that cheapens the grace of the Gospel. It cheapens the life, the death, the resurrection of Christ Himself, who died for our sins so, God's indicative are always the basis and foundation for His imperatives.

As we begin to unpack our passage together, the question we must first ask ourselves is who is leading in the steps of our sanctification? While the title of this study is Sanctification: a Life of Keeping in Step with the Lord, it indicates in a sense that Philippians 2:12-13 have a synergistic approach to our sanctification, a collaborative or a cooperative relationship. While that might be true, ultimately it is the Lord who leads in our sanctification. Here's an illustration that might help. Denise and I have taken ballroom dance classes a few times. No, we aren't quite a level of Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers or Gene Kelly or Debbie Reynolds in Singin' in the Rain, but we are close. They teach in ballroom dancing that someone must lead. Unfortunately, in my case, it's the guy who has to lead but likewise in our sanctification it's the Lord who leads. How do we know this from our text?

How do we describe the relationship between God's working and our working? We have a three letter conjunction between Philippians 2:12 and 13, and it's the word 'for.' Those three letter words are always important. Another important three letter word is 'but' – but for the grace of God. Here we have 'for' which is the glue which holds these two clauses together because it shows us the reason for or why we are commanded to work out our salvation. The imperative of Philippians 2:12 is depended upon the indicative of verse 13. John Murray, I think, says it best in redemption – accomplished and apply, and he states it this way; 'God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works, neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation, as if God did His part and we did ours.' God works in us and we also work but the relation is that because God works, we work. That's the important part of this passage.

The reason I'm spending a lot of time in verses 12 and 13, is it's important because it sets the table for the rest of this passage. If we have a clear understanding of the Lord's working in and our working out the steps of our progressive sanctification, we see how this is the journey we are on for the rest of our lives until Jesus returns or He calls us home, whichever comes first. To help us understand sanctification and God's leading the steps the shorter catechism of Question 35 states it this way; 'Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.' That's our sanctification journey. So it's a gracious and supernatural working or power.

Actually, the Greek for *work* in Philippians 2:13 is different from the Greek used in verse 12. In verse 13, where we see God working the indicative, the Greek word for *work* is *energōn* and it's where we get our word for energy. So Paul's emphasizing that it's God's power, it's His energy, it's by the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby He works His will and causes us to want His will and He works His work where He gives us the strength and the power to do it in us for His good pleasure. So, God works supernaturally in us the entire process of our sanctification – the willing and the doing of it. Anthony Hoekema, a Dutch theologian states it this way; 'We may say that sanctification is a supernatural work of God in which the believer is active. The more active we are in sanctification. The sure we may be that the energizing power that enables us to be active is the power of God.'

So why is it important to understand the Lord's leading the steps in our sanctification journey? Frankly, is because it brings us assurance in this journey. Philippians 1:6 says [6] *And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* That is a promise. God's working is the cause of or for our working. God's work undergirds our working just as justification is every bit the gift and grace of God so too is our sanctification the gift of God's grace to us. Praise be to God that we can't thwart it just as we heard in Philippians 1:6. I don't know about you, but I'm thankful that God is working His sanctification in my life and I can't thwart it because He's going to complete it. God, in His gracious sovereign hand and good providential care is working in us and ordains all the circumstances in our lives, all for His good and His glory so let us not lose hope. God is at work in our sanctification journey. I Thessalonians 4:3b says [3] *For this is the will of God, your sanctification.*

What about our working out our salvation that we see in Philippians 2:12? Ultimately the goal of our sanctification is summed up in the shorter catechism Question 1 which says what is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is what to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. There is the goal, the pinnacle of our sanctification. In Philippians 2:12 the command to work out your salvation is present tense here. Notice, first what it doesn't say. Paul does not say to work *for* your salvation. He says to work *out* your salvation because that work has already been accomplished for us by Christ on the cross. Salvation is God's gift to us. It can't be earned or deserved. I Corinthians 1:30 says [30] *And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.* In Philippians 2:12, salvation refers to sanctification or the fruits. The result of your sanctification in mind progressively growing and maturing through faith. It's true we can't save ourselves. As one commentator says, 'we can and must live lives that show God's saving power that we have made our own.' We are called to work out, work in our salvation. We're not to sit idle.

Also notice Paul says here, 'As you have always obeyed so now work out your own salvation.' Paul doesn't mean that the Philippian church has walked in perfect obedience. Theirs and are obedience flows out of, again context, Christ's perfect obedience. Philippians 2:8 says [8] *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* In His atoning sacrifice to satisfy God's wrath against sin, we step in Christ's perfect obedience for our sanctification. But *work out* here in Philippians 2:12 is active and ongoing. My working out in my sanctification as the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit, works in me to will and to work for His good pleasure.

As I said earlier *work out* in verse 12 is different from verse 13, where it's a Holy Spirit energy, it's inspired by God Himself. *Work out* here is the Greek word, *katargazesthe* and it means to do your best to bring about, to achieve, to accomplish, to produce. As an athlete works out or trains to better himself or herself, so does the Christian. I work out at the YMCA three days a week but probably should be more. I can't sit by passively at my age, frankly, at any age, and hope to stay in some sort of decent shape. I've got to work at it and yet as I work at staying in shape, I have all these aches and pains that seem to mount. I have osteoarthritis in my left knee. I repaired tendons in my right foot. I have weakness in my left hamstrings from being torn, playing church league softball. That's another story. I don't even want to go into it. I have low back issues, shoulder issues, and the list goes on. That is a lot like our sanctification journey. It is full of aches and pains because we're being changed. We're growing in grace, we're bearing new and good fruit, and remaining sin is being rooted out. We're being transformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.

Paul also talks about working out in Romans 6:11-19 which says *[11] So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. [12] Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. [13] Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. [14] For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

[15] What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! [16] Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? [17] But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. [19] I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

The working out our salvation, Paul says, is to be done with fear and trembling. Paul here is talking about we live life in what would be called *Coram Deo* – before the face of God. R.C. Sproul says it this way; ‘to live *Coram Deo* is to live one's entire life in the presence of God under the authority of God and to the glory of God.’ Our working out our sanctification is what a fear that is reverential, that is respectful to our great and awesome God and it's a trembling, healthy fear, a fear of offending God. Ultimately, it's respect, reverence and awe given to God who is already at work in our sanctification and will one day bring it to completion.

How do we work out our salvation with fear and trembling? Three works that I would commend to you that have been beneficial in my own walk. One is John Owen's book, The Mortification of Sin. Two is Chris Lundgaard's book, The Enemy Within which is a contemporary work of Owen's Puritan classic and three J.C. Ryle's book on holiness. Owen speaks to the important work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification quoting Romans 8:13 which says *[13] For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* Owen's thesis in his work is this; ‘Do you mortify? Do you make it your daily work? Be always at it whilst you live. Cease not a day from this work. Be killing sin or it be killing you.’

One of the things I miss about Pastor Harry Reeder is time and time again he would bring our focus back to sanctification in the Christian life and he always talked about killing sin in your life. While it may seem to be that we are overtaken for a season by sin, I don't know about you, but there are times where I feel like I am overtaken by sin, but with the Spirit's help, we are not taken over completely or finally by sin. The work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit is our only sufficiency for the work of mortification of sin, and thereby our sanctification. As Lundgaard says about the work of the Spirit; ‘What does He do? He convinces our heart of the danger of sin. He reveals and teaches the fullness of Christ for our deliverance. He settles our heart in expectation of help from Christ. The Spirit fixes the cross in our heart with its sin killing power. He is the Author and Finisher of our sanctification. He supports us when we cry out to God in distress over sin.’ This should encourage us in our walk because as we have the Holy Spirit within us, then there's nothing that with His help that we cannot overcome. So, in sanctification we mortify, we kill the flesh. Yet while killing the flesh is, our duty it's ultimately the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

We do see success in sanctification – a habitual weakening of sin, a constant fight against sin as we put on the whole armor of God according to Ephesians 6. Albeit maybe slowly, we do see a degree of success in the battle against sin. For example, as humility grows, pride is weakened. That's what the larger catechism questions 75 and 76 on sanctification and repentance unto life are referring to and I'll read a snippet of them, but I encourage you to go back and read the larger catechism of questions 75 and 76. It says, 'having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin and rise unto newness of life (Part answer from Q 75). Repentance unto life is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God... he so grieves for and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavouring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience' (Part answer from Q 76).

For us to work out our salvation as in Philippians 2:12 as a work of God's free grace, it means for us to live the rest of our life of repentance where we're mortifying sin. We're walking in renewed faith. We're strengthened in belief in the Gospel, and we walk daily in new obedience after Christ. To illustrate this using again the ballroom dancing theme, in a waltz, you have to keep time – one, two, three, etc. Our steps in sanctification are a lot like that as well and here are the one, two, three – one walk in repentance, two walk in strengthened belief and three walk daily in new obedience. I want to encourage with what Jerry Bridges, in his book Discipline of Grace says; 'Your worst days are never so bad that you're never 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.' As we think about our sanctification journey we are to lean, or better yet, step into and work out what He works in our sanctification daily by God's grace. It means we step daily into Jesus because there's always grace available for us in Him and that's the encouragement I give.

As we come to this last part, the remainder of this passage in Philippians 2, along with our individual aspect to our sanctification, there's also a corporate or a community aspect to it as well. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, [24] *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* The rest of our passage in Philippians 2 alludes to this.

Philippians 2:14-30 says [14] *Do all things without grumbling or disputing, [15] that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you **shine as lights in the world**, [16] **holding fast to the word of life**, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. [17] Even if I am to **be poured out** as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. [18] Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.*

[19] *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. [20] For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. [21] For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. [22] But you know Timothy's **proven worth**, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. [23] I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, [24] and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.*

[25] *I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and **fellow soldier**, and your messenger and minister to my need, [26] for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. [27] Indeed he*

was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. [28] I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. [29] So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, [30] for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

There are several beautiful word pictures of what it practically looks like to keep in step with the Lord's leading and our sanctification. Paul says things like 'Shine His light, hold fast to the Word of life, be poured out, proven worth, a fellow soldier.' Our sanctification is like shining a light in the world. Looking at Philippians 2:14-15 I'll admit I grumble and complain at bad drivers. My driving has gotten worse, I'll admit, since I moved to Alabama almost six years ago. But you know what? It's everyone else's fault. It's not my fault. No, it's an area I still need lots of sanctifying work in. As I grumble and complain about other drivers in the car I always hear my wife say this; 'You know, I'm the only one that can hear you in the car.' Which is true. I know. I need to work this out in my own sanctification. Paul gives us another command here when he says to do all things without grumbling. The Greek there means actually muttering or murmuring, complaining or questioning or arguing or disputing, doubting.

Earlier in Philippians 2 Paul is addressing unity and he'll address it again in Philippians 4 and now he addresses grumbling and complaining within the church, which also impacts unity and peace. Here it should bring to our minds the Israelites in the wilderness wanderings in Exodus 15 through 17. You can read that account too, in Numbers 11 through 17. The people grumbled and complained about their freedom. They grumbled at wandering in the desert. They grumbled at no water. They grumbled that they had no food. Psalm 78 retells Israel's history, from the time of the Exodus to the reign of David, and listen to some of the verbs the Psalmist used for the actions of the people towards God. They rebelled, tested, demanded, sinned, forgot, provoked, grieved Him, didn't believe, didn't trust, didn't remember, didn't keep, turned away, acted treacherously. Yet, while they grumbled and questioned, God was faithful and gracious time and time again to His people. He's still gracious to His people today.

A grumbling or questioning spirit expresses in gratitude. It lacks love for others. It shows pride toward others. It denies the grace of the Gospel in our lives and it actually works against sanctification flowing in and out of our lives. Why did Israel grumble? Why do we grumble and complain? I believe like Israel, we grumble and complain because we forget. We forget God's promises. We forget His provision and His deliverance. We forget that He defends us. We forget His forgiveness, His faithfulness, His goodness, and ultimately, we forget His grace. John Piper says "grumbling, whining and thanklessness are not ultimately the heart's response to circumstances, but ultimately to God Himself." So, complaining is ultimately rooted in the heart, like James 4:1 says, [1] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? Ultimately, our hearts want to hold on to what we want to hold on to. And so if we can't hold on to it, we grumble, we question, we complain.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called instead to unconditionally surrender these passions at war within us to God, in Christ. When our eyes and hearts are fixed here, inward, then they can't be fixed there, outward. Paul calls it here in this passage, the crooked and twisted generation, among whom we're called to shine as lights in the world and Paul is quoting Daniel 12:3 there. Jesus Himself in Matthew 5 called us also. So Paul calls the church to shine as lights in the world in such a way that in this passage he says that we would be blameless, innocent children of God without blemish. He doesn't mean perfect here, but daily we live life totally

dependent upon the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to show the world what it means to belong to and serve our King.

How can we do this if we are constantly grumbling and complaining and questioning as Christians? So how can we apply Philippians 2:14 and 15 to our lives? Here are some ways to do this, some applications. First, I believe a little more thankfulness is a remedy, and it goes a long way in removing the grumbling and complaining spirit. Second, daily remember God's gracious, deliverance and redemption of your life through Christ. Third, run to the foot of the cross when you're grumbling and complaining for the cross shuts it down. After all, Christ went to the cross with joy over you and me, not grumbling and complaining. Fourth, I think we need to keep short accounts with one another and strive for peace. Hebrews 12:14-15 says, *[14] Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. [15] See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.* Lastly, remember our calling is to shine as light in the world. I can't quote it any better than Shaffer who says this; 'Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful. Christian community is the final apologetic. If we do not show love to one another, the world has a right to question whether Christianity is true.'

Sanctification, too, is alive, holding fast to the Word of life. Paul gives us a word picture of holding fast in our sanctification in Philippians 2:16. I'm not only to hold the Word of life out and present it to others, but I'm to hold it fast. I'm to hold it tightly, cling to it, grasp it as a means of sanctifying grace for it's the life to my soul as Paul says. We're all creatures of habit. Think about it. We like our stuff a certain way. We sleep on the same side of the bed with the same pillows, maybe. I don't know about you, but I get my one eighth of the bed and Denise gets the other 7/8. We sit in the same place at church. You get the point. Maybe not anymore after COVID.

James K. A. Smith wrote a book titled [You Are What You Love; The Spiritual Power of Habit](#). I think it's important here as we think about the Word of God and it being the Word of life and we're grasping and holding it tightly. Smith's thesis is, we are what we love because we live toward what we want and desire. Meaning we are what we worship and we worship what we love. Love is a virtue. Smith says it is learned through imitation, practice and habit and it requires in the Christian life, much of the time that our loves be recalibrated, reformed, and reconditioned. How does our love get aimed and directed towards this end? Smith says, 'That it's through immersion in practice. It is building habits that fundamentally shape who we are.' As Christians, what he means is, immersing ourselves in worship, discipleship, community, and what the reformers call the means of grace – the Word, sacraments and prayer. I think Smith is right on. Those are the practices. Those are the habits and means of sanctifying us to more and more love God and to love others. And the church is the place where God invites us to be immersed in this.

It's through God's gracious, sanctifying means of grace that we persevere in the faith. I think that's what Paul means here at the end of Philippians 2:16, so that in the Day of Christ, I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. He's talking about his perseverance. He's talking about the Philippians perseverance. He's talking about our perseverance. Paul's running and laboring is not in vain. Our running and laboring is not in vain. It's the fruit of God's sanctifying grace in his life, our lives and the lives of the church. So the question for us, as we look at this verse and we think about immersing ourself in these habits, these means of grace that he's given us, are you building those spiritual habits in your life? Do they shape who you are and

what you love – the Lord others yourself, even His creation? Where do you like me, need to be recalibrated, reformed, reshaped, reconditioned in His love so that they are Christ's and what He loves?

Jonathan Edwards says in his book In Religious Affections; 'that which men love, they desire to have and to be united to and possessed of. That beauty which men delight in, they desire to be adorned with. Those acts which men delight in, they necessarily inclined to do.' His point is in this question, is Christ and His means of grace my love? Is He my beauty? Is He my delight? Do I desire to be adorned with Christ through His means of grace that He has so graciously given us?

In Philippians 2:17-18, Paul says that sanctification really is a life about being poured out in sacrifice. So Paul uses this word picture of being poured out to describe his life and subsequently that of the church. He viewed his life as a drink offering being poured out upon really the main sacrifice, as you might read that passage, of the Philippians sacrificial faith so in a sense, to complete it as such; that their lives lived out as a sacrifice of faith offered to God was the main sacrifice. Paul's saying that if it be the Lord's will, that if one thing remains to make that offering perfectly acceptable, that his own life be sacrificed and credited to their account. That was Paul's view of the Philippian church. That's Paul's view of us – the sacrificial offering being poured out.

Christ's life was poured out as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus says in Matthew 26:28, [28] *for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* Paul's life would soon be poured out. II Timothy 4:6 says [6] *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.* How about us? We too are called to sacrifice, to pour out our lives in life and death for the sake of Christ, our Lord and Savior. That's part of our sanctification. Have you offered your life as a sacrificial offering to God? Romans 12:1 says [1] *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

As gold when being purified is heated up so that the impurities rise to the surface to be removed so too when our lives are heated up by trials, by suffering through sacrifice, we grow in grace in our sanctification by becoming more and more like Jesus. Thanks be to God that, as Paul says here, a theme throughout Philippians, some 16 times is quoted; I am glad and rejoice with you. Likewise, as he gives another command you also should be glad and rejoice with me. We rejoice because looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfector of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despised the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2). Think about it. The joy that was set before Jesus was for you and for me. His sacrifice for our sins was securing our salvation in place in heaven for all eternity and through this joy to the Gospel advances, through our sacrifice of living lives poured out to those around us.

Lastly, Paul talks about a life of servanthood and includes Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul closes the section in Philippians 2:19-30 by giving us two proven examples of servanthood and this is a picture of sanctification. Timothy and Epaphroditus faithfully served Paul in the church. They were genuinely concerned for others; self-giving not self-seeking. Paul says they are of proven worth. They were trusted. They were faithful servants in the Gospel. Fellow workers, fellow soldiers, he calls them – doing battle together as they risked their very lives in service to Christ and His church. The question I take away from is, do I have someone like a Timothy or Epaphroditus in my life? That's what I take away in my sanctification; am I this to someone else? Am I a Timothy or Epaphroditus to someone else? Much of God's work of

sanctification is done as a band of brothers and sisters doing life together through these trials, through suffering, through sacrifice. It's really about living out our stories together within the larger story of God's redemptive plan.

I like to use the acrostic or acronym R.E.A.L. We live REAL lives in the Gospel, meaning they are (R) relational – we dig deep into one another's lives. We are (E) examples through our life on life discipleship, through iron sharpening iron. We're (A) available – we spend time investing into one another's lives. This is Timothy. This is Epaphroditus. The L is they (L) lived out their life story in such a way that they were transparent. They were real around others. Epaphroditus almost died but yet he wanted to minister to the saints in Philippi and to Paul for he was torn between the two. You and I need men and women like this in our lives and on our sanctification journey – fellow servants in the Gospel journey who are genuine, of proven worth, old or younger in the faith, fellow workers and soldiers of Christ who will go to the mat with you in your walk with Christ. We need to prioritize a few of these deep friendships and the steps of our sanctification and journey.

As we think about this journey, a life of keeping in step with the Lord, I close with the lyrics of a song by Rich Mullins who wrote a familiar praise song called *Awesome God* but he also wrote another song called *Sometimes By Step* that I think exactly describes what Paul is talking about here in our working out and God working in us. The lyrics to *Sometimes By Step*;

*Sometimes I think of Abraham
How one star he saw had been lit for me
He was a stranger in this land
And I am that, no less than he
And on this road to righteousness
Sometimes the climb can be so steep
I may falter in my steps
But never beyond Your reach*

*Oh God, You are my God
And I will ever praise You
Oh God, You are my God
And I will ever praise You
And I will seek You in the morning
And I will learn to walk in Your ways
And step by step You'll lead me
And I will follow You all of my days*

That's the beautiful picture of our sanctification – working out, working in our sanctification as step by step. He leads us and we seek through our sanctification to follow Him all the days of our lives. The question for us is am I growing in that sanctification work that He is doing? As I look back over my Christian life, do I see a pattern of growth in my sanctification life?

Finally, think about the steps to the cross that our Savior took as you think about the steps of your sanctification journey. Each step Christ bore the burden of His heavy cross upon His bloodied and beaten back. Each step He bore the full weight of our sin upon His shoulders. Each step He bore the full weight of the wrath of God against sin and yet each step He secured our redemption. Each step He secured our justification before the Father. Each step He secured our adoption as sons and daughters and each step He secured and is securing our sanctification with

each step to the cross and ultimately through His death and resurrection He secured and will secure our glorification in our eternity in heaven. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, through our Savior's steps to the cross and through His grace given, through our Helper, the Holy Spirit, we are enabled more and more to work out and step into our sanctification. It's what Jesus prayed to His Father in the High Priestly prayer for us in John 17 when He said, 'Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world so I've sent them into the world and for their sake, I consecrate Myself. I sanctify Myself that they also may be sanctified and set apart, made holy in this truth.' May You do this work in our hearts and lives for we ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.