

The Message

Note: No sermon is quite the same when you read it. You miss the inflections, the understanding that you gain in the hearing. Nevertheless, the words are shared with you here.

Date: July 11, 2010

Scripture: Phil. 2:12-16b

Speaker: Ray Hughes

ALL STARS

Welcome! I would like to take this time to welcome you to Foundry. If you're not part of our congregation, I think you will find that this church is quite like home. Unfortunately, not everyone has a home. There are many people who are homeless spiritually. They're not even aware that they need a spiritual home.

Have you ever gone home and had that experience where you re-shift and re-focus things? For me, home is Florida; it's the place where I grew up. A couple of months ago, I went home to perform my dad's wedding. Now, I know that performing your parent's wedding is a unique situation. My mom passed away six years ago. For the last six years, my brother, my sister, and I have been praying that God would bring the right woman into our dad's life.

God just brought the most amazing, wonderful woman into my father's life. She's sixty years old and has never been married. So, my dad and Juanice, his future wife, have been planning this wedding. They've been helped by my wife, who is a wedding planner. Jacqueline said, "Juanice is like a twenty-two year old bride. She's so excited about her day."

Going home, we were filled with anticipation about the prospect of being part of this day. I don't think many of you understand how small my hometown is. The town is so small that we didn't have a traffic light in the whole county so everyone knows everybody. Growing up in that church, I was baptized there, confirmed there, and experienced the call to the ministry there. Six years ago, I performed my mom's funeral there.

Standing there performing my dad's wedding, I could see my dad standing to my left as the bride walked down the aisle. While I stood there, I got this vivid image of the day I preached my mom's funeral...and it was all I could do to hold my emotions in check. I had a little time to collect myself, and God gave me enough of his grace to push through that time.

What I realized in that moment is that life is all about seasons and patterns and rhythms...and God guides us through all those different stages. Being a

Christian is not just about the “ups.” In this moment at my dad’s wedding, I saw a wonderful celebration. In that crowd were all of my former Sunday School teachers. In a way, it was like my whole life was flashing in front of my eyes. Even Juanice, my dad’s bride, realized the importance of getting to know my dad’s family. Both of my mom’s parents are still alive and her brothers and sisters. And they all came to the wedding and sat on the front row...the same places they were sitting at my mom’s funeral. So you can see that this was an incredible experience.

But God gave me such a vision that day for his grace and his sustaining strength through all things. He brings us through celebrations and he brings us through those difficult times as well. In those things, he gives us clarity in all matters. When we go home, we get clarity about what really matters.

In the same way, Paul speaks to the people in Philippi in our scripture passage. He speaks about the things that really matter and wants to emphasize to the Philippians the necessity of staying focused on those things.

If you remember a couple of weeks, Pastor Mike gave a message from the first part of Philippians. In his sermon, he spoke about the need to consider “others better than yourself” (Phil. 2:3). In other words, value other people’s needs more than you value your own needs. Put their needs ahead of your own. Think about how you can make other people’s lives better than your own. Then, Paul explains how Jesus is the perfect example of this concept. Jesus didn’t think of equality with God something to be grasped, but Jesus humbled himself and died on the cross. He died for us to have eternal life. There’s our example. Live your lives for one another. Make one another better. That’s what an excellent life looks like.

In verse twelve, Paul writes, “Therefore...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” What does this mean? This verse can be confusing. If we know Paul’s writing, we know that salvation is not about working, but about God’s grace working within us. It’s about our faith and trust in his mercy and grace. He gives us the things that make our relationship with God *right*.

So, why does Paul write “work out your salvation with fear and trembling”? I think the answer to this question is about maturing on the inside. We all want to live excellent lives. We all want our lives to be valuable in some way. We want some sense of meaning and significance in our lives. But sometimes we fail and struggle and focus our attention on the wrong way of achieving that significance.

Paul writes that “excellence” looks different to believers than the way the world looks at it. For instance, the world doesn’t understand the “excellence” that Jesus showed us when he gave his life for us. When Paul wrote this epistle, he was in prison so he had time to reflect in his letter. The Philippian Church was his first church. He wanted them to continue to focus on maturing the inside of

their lives because God cares more about the internal than the external things of life.

Our spirits mature and changes. Remember our Mission Statement? At Foundry, we “transform all people into faithful servants of Jesus Christ.” We believe that we are *transformed* from living one way into living another through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We see this power in the Old Testament character of Caleb. Caleb was one of the spies that went into the Promised Land. God had already told the Israelites that he was going to give them this land. The spies check out the territory, but only Caleb and Joshua return with a favorable report. “We can do this because God has promised us.” All the other spies looked at the obstacles in their way. Many of us go through life like those spies. We look at the circumstances and think, “We’re not going to have success.”

God says, “You can have victory. I will give you victory.” Notice what God says about Caleb.

But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. (Numbers 14:24)

Caleb realizes God’s promise because he was of a *different spirit*.

If you’re surrounded by cynics, you don’t have to be cynical. If you’re surrounded by pessimists, so what? According to God, it doesn’t matter what your circumstances are. God is bigger than any circumstance.

What is your attitude as you begin the day? What does God say about you? What does God say about your character? In Proverbs 31:30, God says, “Charm can mislead and beauty soon fades. The woman to be admired and praised is the woman who lives in the Fear-of-God.” External things will fade away. The person to be admired is the one who lives in the fear of God.

What does it mean to be a person of character? How much time do you spend thinking about your character, your inner life? I love the story of Job; he had a good heart. His life gives us another example of circumstances being one part of our life and God still having our heart. If you remember the story, Job was very prosperous.

Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand

and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” (Job 1:8-11)

In other words, Satan says that Job is bigger on the outside than he is on the inside. If God takes away all the external successes of Job, Satan says that Job will curse God and God will see the real character of Job.

However, God says, “I know this man. I know his heart.” As the story unfolds, Job loses everything. Job’s friends come to him and excuse him of sinning. Job responds that he has not sinned and that God is faithful. While Job questions God, he keeps his heart pure. Although Satan purports that Job is “big” on the outside, God says, “No, Job is bigger on the inside.”

What does God say about you? Many of us struggle with putting up an image that is not consistent with who we are in our hearts. This is what Paul says: “Continue to work out your salvation.” Continue to work out the things of your heart, the things that really matter.

John Maxwell, leader and pastor, talks about the stages of working out our salvation and focusing on the inside when the world tells us to focus on the outside.

The first stage is that we must come to a place where we say help me. We have to be willing to admit to God that we need his help. Salvation is based on this idea. There is no salvation without the admittance of our need for God’s grace and his presence to forgive us of our sins. It starts with this child-like faith. I’ve never met a child didn’t at one time or another asked for help. Kids know to ask for help. As we get older, asking for help becomes more difficult. Ask God for help; invite him to help us. Come to a state of humility.

The second step becomes more challenging because we need to accept our vulnerability. In this step, we ask God to search me. When we say, search me and find me and discover where my heart is, we’re inviting God into our inner lives. Remember that Paul writes, “work out your salvation with *fear and trembling*.”

Isn’t God always telling us to “fear not”? If you search sermons on the internet on fear, the subject will be about our *not* fearing. Nevertheless, all scripture speaks of “a fear of God.” What does that look like? Mike and I were discussing this subject. He brought up the fact that the scientific community has discovered that when people are in a tense moment of fear, this feeling forces the brain to give control to the ego. Fear should force us to give control to God. When we fear God and acknowledge who he is, our natural and good response is a holy fear. Look at every instance of fear in the Bible. When people come face to face with God, they think they are about to die. A fear strikes them because they are in the presence of God.

In every instance, what is God's response? "Fear not." What is the difference between fearing God and "fearing" not? I think God wants us to have this awe of him and understand his power and might and not avoid the stress of that moment. When we say "search me, God," that's a fearful place because we are vulnerable. God wants us to understand the danger of our sin and that our heart is not clean and not pure. When we invite him to search us, our natural response is fear. But God's response is "fear not."

Yes, it is dangerous that we still have resentment in our hearts over something that happened a long time ago. Yes, it is dangerous to your soul that you are looking at pornography on the internet. Yes, it is very dangerous the thoughts that you harbor in your heart, but we are going to work on that. In every case, God is going to work with us on whatever is in our hearts.

The next step is that we have to let God make us who we are not. We have to go through this stress. Alcoholics Anonymous understands this point. When a person struggles with addiction and avoids the stress, the person is twice as likely to relapse. In our inner life, we have to go through this stress and vulnerability of allowing God to search us so that we can grow. Paul writes that it is "his spirit at work within you." In order to fulfill God's purposes, we must let God work.

When we begin to let God change us, search us, and know us, he will begin using us like we've never imagined. He will make us something he can use to achieve his purposes.

Finally, God uses us "to achieve his purposes." In this stage, we turn our titles into testimonies. I had the opportunity to perform a wedding yesterday. The couple that married yesterday is relatively new to our congregation. But God has been using Foundry to change their lives. Susan and Michael will both tell you that they have been successful in their business lives, but they were doing so without God. They *knew* who God was but they needed to move beyond just knowing him. God has intervened in their lives and now Susan and Michael have a testimony and they are using everything they have to honor him.

God wants to do that in every person's life. He wants to change us and transform us into something different. The challenge is to move from a self-absorbed life to a God driven life. He changes us from being so self-absorbed.

I have kids and I have discovered that their favorite word is "mine." According to a toddler, if I like it, it's mine. If it's in my hands, it's mine. If I can take it from you, it's mine. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine. You get the idea. If it's broken, it's yours. We know how kids are. But if we're honest, we have to admit that maybe we're a little bit that way.

To live a life of excellence, we must say, "It's not my life—it's yours." Take my life, God. Help me, search me, and use me.