

## 2025-06-29 - The Everyday Miracle of Sanctification - Philippians 2:12-18

Pastor Matt Yamada

### **The Everyday Miracle of Sanctification**

Philippians 2:12-18

Good morning to you today. For those of you who do not know me, my name is Matt Yamada, and I am the associate pastor of this church. I'm typically at the other side of the building, leading the Japanese language congregation. Today is a special day for our congregation and for our church as a whole because we have the Japanese food luncheon from noon. If you didn't know, we have the luncheon happening from noon, and all of you are welcome. It's a donation luncheon for the summer camp that we're having, and we will be serving really delicious Japanese cuisine. So, if any of you are interested, we would love to have you there. I'm, once again, truly grateful for this exciting opportunity to share God's word with you.

*Let me begin with the word of prayer. Let's pray. Heavenly God, we come before you, truly grateful that we are made for more. We are made for more than just this life. Lord, you have given us eternal life that we can look to. And Lord, you have given us joy. It's not joy that this world can take away. It's a joy that's everlasting, that's found in Christ the Lord. I pray as we go through this passage, we will see this joy overflowing from inside of us as the Holy Spirit works within us. We love you. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*

So, let me start out with a simple question this morning: Can you name 20 things that you're grateful for? Twenty things that you're grateful for? Start counting. OK, 20 things you're grateful for. I asked this because someone recently challenged me to do this, and I tried it, right? And I started out strong: salvation in Christ, joy in Christ, my beautiful and supportive wife, my kids, my extended family, my friends, our church community, the recent baptism—that has been really amazing, and I'm going to praise the Lord for that. And the roof over our heads, AC—who's thankful for AC? It's really hot these couple of days now, so I'm really grateful for that. Food on the table, delicious coffee and snacks that get served every Sunday, and I thank the deaconess for that. And Wi-Fi, free Wi-Fi, right? I'm really grateful for that.

But then, somewhere along the line, around number 14, I kind of started stalling. I'm like, "Oh, what else am I thankful for?" Right? I'm just like, "Oh, maybe Sunday naps, right? Those are nice, right? Matching socks—you get to find, like, 'Oh, wow, this is nice.'" It's like, what else? What else? What else? Like, maybe gravity, you know? And it started to get a little rough. And in that moment, as I was writing those things down, I realized something. I realized that I'm not consistently thankful as I'd like to be. That's an area that I want to grow in. But we pretty much all have areas we want to grow in. For some of us, it's spiritual

disciplines, right? We want to be better at praying or reading our Bible, to be more consistent. For others, it might be the character of patience, or maybe how we relate to our families or manage our time. Even for me, as a pastor, I still find plenty of room to grow, and I pray to the Lord, "Lord, I pray that I'll grow in this area. Lord, I need your help."

So, we all have those areas, and as followers of Christ, one of the most important places we want to grow in is our spiritual walk, right? Our spiritual walk with the Lord, our faith, our character. Here's the dilemma, and this is the dilemma that all Christians will face: We want to grow, but if we all can be honest, at times we feel like we are stuck in a rut. We feel like we are in a spiritually dry place where we just don't have the motivation to read the Bible or pray or to go to church. The mundane, ordinary, everyday things of life are actually taking life away from us. We'll never say it out loud, but we feel the gravity of that weight in our hearts sometimes. And you're like, "Oh." Or it might be that you have a certain kind of sin that you feel like you cannot see victory in. It might be anger, lust, unforgiveness. Or it might be that, with how busy life is with all these responsibilities, even good ones like ministry, like family, like friends, you feel like you're about to just burn out. You wonder sometimes, "Why am I doing this? Is this all worth it?"

I still remember one particular week when I was in seminary. I was pastoring and trying to wrap up my theology paper, and we had just finished a big Sunday outreach that day. It was 3:00 AM in the morning, I was exhausted, and I found myself sitting in front of my laptop, and my laptop was closed, and I'm like, "You know, is this all worth it?" Right? So tired. "What am I doing?" Maybe you've had your 3:00 AM moments, or maybe you're living in one right now. And if that's where you are today—tired, spiritually dry, or wondering if all the effort is worth it—let me tell you this: You're not alone. And this passage that we're looking at today, *Philippians Chapter 2*, is for you. Because even in our weariness, even in our mundane grind in our daily lives, God is doing something miraculous. He's growing us. He's shaping us. He's changing us.

So, that brings us to today's passage in *Philippians Chapter 2*. Paul, the Apostle Paul, writes to the believers, not from a cozy retreat center. He is writing this from a prison, and somehow, even there, he's chained, he's forgotten, but he writes with joy, with purpose, and with hope. So today, I want to share with you three motivations to keep going in your walk with the Lord, even when it's hard—especially when it's hard.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but must more in my absence, work out your own salvation <b>with fear and trembling</b> , Philippians 2:12
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So, if you have your Bibles, please turn to *Philippians Chapter 2*. We'll be looking from verse 12. Verse 12 reads: **"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."***

#### Motivation 1: For Our Spiritual Growth

So, let's jump into the first motivation **for our spiritual growth**, and it's Christ's presence with us. Christ's presence with us. So, what does Paul in verse 12 mean when he says, "work out your own salvation"? What do you think he means when he says, "work out your own salvation"? Is he talking about earning our way to heaven or by doing good things God will approve you and let you in? Is that what he's saying? I hope you're shaking your head now—no. When you believe in the gospel, you are justified at that very moment.

Justification means that we're made right in God's sight, not by our own works, but by faith in Jesus's finished work on the cross and the resurrection. So, if it's not talking about justification, then what is he talking about here when he says, "work out your salvation"?

#### Sanctification:

A process of Becoming Holy or Set Apart

Paul here is talking about our *sanctification*, *sanctification*. What is *sanctification*? It's a process of becoming holy or set apart. It's this ongoing change and growth that happens in our lives as we become more like Jesus. To put it more simply, *sanctification* is the process of becoming more like Jesus every day, OK? It's how God patiently renovates our character, our attitudes, our desires, our choices, so we reflect more of Christ over time. And hearing that, it sounds exciting, right? Like, "Yes, yes." But the process itself is very slow and ordinary. It's not flashy like the burning bush or turning water into wine. Most days, this *sanctification* looks more like, by the grace of God, you become patient in traffic, or biting your tongue when you want to say something sharp, or choosing to pray when you don't feel like it. It's those ordinary moments, but God is doing something supernatural. He's shaping your heart through those moments.

Let me give you a picture. So, back in Japan, my family and I used to watch this TV show called *Ticky Before After*, and it's a show, like a renovation show, where they take an old, dysfunctional home and completely renovate it. At the beginning of each episode, the house is just really in terrible shape and falling apart, outdated. But there is a person that will come in, like a master renovator, and he will evaluate the house, listen to the homeowner's concerns, and work on the process together with the homeowner. I'll show you the picture. There's this guy, right? You know that this guy can fix your house. So, he comes in, and this is the old home—it's all old, janky, broken home—and then he speaks to the homeowner, he starts renovating it, and this old house becomes new, right? And he does all these things, and it's like, "Wow, this is amazing." As we watch this, I'm like, "This is a huge change." And we get to see all this, but the process itself, right? The result looks

amazing, right? But the process itself? It's not glamorous, takes time, a lot of setbacks. Some walls had to be taken down before new ones could go up. Had to do cleaning.

And as I was thinking about this show, this renovation process, it's a lot like our *sanctification*. Our lives, before we knew the Lord, might start out like that old, broken-down house—full of flaws, sinful habits, areas that need serious work. But as we know Him, and as we get to know Him more, and as we allow God to work on us, He starts renovating our hearts. It's a process that takes time. Some of you have been in this process for a long time; some of us are still new. And we might not see the results right away, but over time, God is changing us. He is working in us, and He is making us more like Christ. So, just like how the homeowner in the show trusted the renovator to make their house into something amazing, we also need to trust God in the process of *sanctification*. It's a journey. It's a marathon, right? But when we trust Him, in the end, it's God's work in us that makes all the difference. We need to allow Him to work in our lives.

So, how do we actually become more like Christ? How do we allow Him? The Apostle Paul says we should do this with *fear and trembling*, with *fear and trembling*. So, what does he mean by *fear and trembling*? You know, that doesn't mean we should be scared of God, right? Or that He's angry with us or waiting to catch us when we're doing something wrong. No, we're already forgiven and loved and right with God if we know Him. So, what Paul is really talking about here is having a deep respect and awe for who God is. Think about this: This is the same God who, in the end, every person will acknowledge Him as Lord, right? "Every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that He is Lord" (*Philippians 2:10-11*). This is not just Christians; this is all humanity. Intense. So, when Paul tells us to work and serve and to pray and to love, he's saying we should do all these things, not out of guilt or shame, but we should do all these things with a heart that truly loves and honors God.

OK, but think about reality. Like, think about this: Life, trying to live for Jesus, isn't always easy. We want to grow spiritually. We want to be patient; we want to grow in joy and love. But some days, it's hard. Some mornings, you wake up, and the last thing you feel like doing is opening your Bible. You're tired, you're behind, and you figure, "I'll do it tomorrow." And then that tomorrow becomes the next day, and then the next. And you know exactly what I'm talking about. And before you know it, that's something that used to bring joy now feels like just another thing on the to-do list. Maybe you're trying to be kind and gracious to someone, but that one person is just being so difficult, or your family member just knows how to push your buttons. And we wonder, like, "Is this worth it?" Right? "I love the Lord, yes, but it's just too hard."

For it is God who works in you, *both to will and to work* for his good pleasure.

Philippians 2:13

But in those moments, Paul's words in verse 13 hit differently. Paul says, "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (*Philippians 2:13*). That's good news. He's not saying, "No, no, no, you gotta just keep trying harder." No, that's not what God says. He's saying God is working in you, and not just to work, but to *will*, right? That's our desire. He's saying He's the one who can give you the desire and also the power to keep going.

"Christian life is not hard; it's impossible."
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I once heard this preacher say this; he says, "Christian life is not hard; it's impossible." It might sound discouraging, like, "Oh," but it's actually encouraging when you think about it. Without God's strength, we can't please Him or do what He desires us to do, right? We're weaker than we think, and that's a good thing. And that's a good thing because when we realize our weakness, we open the door for God's power to show up in our lives.

Let me share a quick story from my college years. So, back in college, I started this worship and prayer group every Saturday night. Initially, it was just me and my friends with our guitars, and we'd have our coffee, just hang out, sing, pray, you know, have small talk. But as we continued to do this over time, the group started to grow, and at one point, we had close to 300 people gather every Saturday, and it was kind of like a small church. And I really enjoyed it. But I was leading the group, and with how big we became, I felt the need to create structure, you know—song lists for that week, who's leading which songs, how should we split the prayer group into small groups. And it was wonderful, that group was, but I was tired. It just brought a huge burden in my life, and at one point, I was drinking five cups of coffee a day, running on four hours of sleep, and when you do that, what happens is your hands start to shake, always shaking. And I'm like, "Oh, this is not good," right? But I'm like, "But this is something that I need to do. This is my responsibility. This is what God gave me. You know, the people need me. The ministry needs me. I just gotta keep going." I just kept doing this. I kept doing this, and it wasn't getting any better.

And one day, I woke up, and I thought to myself, "I can't do this anymore. I can't do this anymore." I was like, "I can't go, right? I can't do anything anymore." And I called the leaders, and I'm like, "Hey, I'm sorry. I need a break." And they were gracious enough to say, "It's fine. Get some rest." I felt miserable, felt like I was failing the group, and I felt like I was ultimately failing God, that God gave me this responsibility, and I failed. But I also knew that I had nothing within me to keep going. So, I took a break, and after a couple of weeks, when you actually sleep and don't drink as much coffee, you feel rested, right? And I felt better. And I wanted to see how the group was doing, so I went to that Saturday night worship group. And when I went, the sight blew me away. The place was packed, and people were worshipping. They were praying, there, praising the Lord, and that view brought tears to my

eyes and a huge sense of comfort and conviction, too. And I'm like, "Wow, God, you did this. You did this, and all along, this was about you, and it was never about me." He was the one who started it, and He was the one who kept it going. The students weren't there for me, right, for my talk or for my preparation. They were there to praise Him.

So, my point is, if you're involved in a ministry or some form of responsibility in some capacity in ministry, don't worry that if you leave, things will fall apart. Remember that it's not all on you. If it's something God wants to keep using, He will provide the people and the strength to make it happen. I'm not saying just quit, no, don't quit just because it's hard. But do take a step back sometimes and check your heart. Are you doing it because you think it's all up to you? "I gotta do this. I need to do this." Or are you doing it with the joy God gives you to serve? If your joy has faded, pray and ask God to renew it. He is the one who works, but also, He is the one who gives us the *will*, right? And if you feel like you've been running on empty, talk to somebody. Share, pray. Don't let guilt or pressure keep you stuck in a burnout. That's the devil's scheme. Jesus is with you, and He's giving you the desire and the power to keep going. And even when you can't see it, He's still working within you. So, let's take a breath, right? And remember that Christ is with you.

#### Motivation 2: Christ's Light Through Us

So, now let's move to the second motivation to keep going in our walk with the Lord. Here it is: **Christ's light through us**. Christ's light through us.

"Do all things **without grumbling or disputing**, 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."

*Philippians 2:14-15*

Listen to how Paul puts this in *Philippians 2:14-15*: "**Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 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.**" So, Paul here is saying, "Do you want to shine, right? Do you want to shine as a Christian? Do you want to be a witness? Do you want to be a light to the world?" And we're like, "Yes." Then, he says, "Stop complaining." Right? "Stop arguing." Like, "Oh, that's kind of boring. I wanna be a light, then stop complaining." That's what he says. But what Paul is sharing here is that our attitude shapes our witness. Let's talk about that for a second. Why do you think complaining is such a big deal to Paul? We're just venting, right? This is God's word. Why is complaining such a big deal? We all do it, right? Show of hands: Who never, ever complained in your lifetime? Man, I gotta learn from you, but no, I'm pretty sure we're all here. I've complained at least once here, right? You complain about a lot of things: the weather, "It's so cold," and now we're like, "It's so hot." Right? Complain about our coworkers, our kids, our commute, our church—hope not—our schedule, how tired we are.

And some days, we're all tempted to go full-on grumble mode, right? It's like, "Oh, this is not working. Oh, this is that."

But Paul is reminding us that complaining is what dims our light. It disconnects us from gratitude, and it short-circuits our joy. And maybe, most importantly, complaining keeps us from seeing God clearly in our everyday lives. Think about the Israelites in the Old Testament. What did God do for them? God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. He parted the Red Sea for them. He rained down manna from heaven and led them by fire at night and cloud by day. But what did they do? What did the Israelites do most immediately? Were they like, "Praise the Lord, the Lord is faithful"? No, "I'm so thirsty." Right? "Moses brought us out here to die. Oh, let's go back to Egypt." They grumbled. They complained. And here's what happened to them: They stopped trusting God. They stopped remembering His faithfulness, and because of that, a journey that should have taken weeks ended up lasting 40 years. They literally wandered in circles, right, and many of them never got to the promised land.

And that's what grumbling can do to us. It turns our forward motion into a loop. It keeps us stuck in frustration instead of walking in faith. It's not that God stopped being faithful; it's that they stopped seeing God that way. There's a lot in life that we can grumble about, right? Your job is draining you, or your kids are driving you crazy, or you're overwhelmed with school, with work, health issues, or that one person who just constantly tests your patience. And you know that God is good. You've seen Him provide in the past, but in that moment, you forget. In that moment of forgetting, we complain instead of giving thanks. We grumble instead of trust.

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.
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*Philippians 2:16*

So, how do we fight that when those temptations come? How do we fight it? Paul tells us in verse 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"** (*Philippians 2:16*). Holding fast to the word of life. It's the word of God, the promises of the gospel that give us life, that keep us grounded and hopeful. God's word reminds us of who we are, what God has done, and where we're headed. Here's a picture that might help: Let's say you're going on an amazing vacation, right? Let's say you're going to a beach cottage for a week—sunsets, waves, good food, your favorite people—and you've been counting down the days for months, right? "When is it going to happen? When is it going to happen?" And the week before the vacation, let's say your boss dumps extra work on your plate, or your car makes weird noises, or the kids won't stop. It will still frustrate you, but in the back of your mind, you're like, "I got that beach vacation coming up," right? That hope changes how you handle pressure, right?



Now, here's the thing: The hope we have in Christ is way better than a beach vacation. Amen. It's eternal. It's guaranteed. It can't be taken away from you, and when you hold on to that, you can face life's pressures without spiraling. You can complain less, and you can trust Him more. And when people see that in you, they'll wonder, "What is it about this person that's different?" That's when your life begins to shine. That's when you become the light. So, if you feel like you've been stuck in a cycle of grumbling, if you feel like you're not growing, ask God for help. Go back to His word, hold on to it. Holding fast—it's not just grabbing, you know, it's holding tight because you need it. Preach the gospel to yourself daily. Remind your heart that God is still good, God is still leading me, and God is still at work. And as you do, as you hold tight, you'll find your light starts to grow brighter—not because you're trying harder, but because you're holding on to something deeper, and that's hope. That is the word that gives life.

Now, let's move on to our final motivation today: What keeps us going when life is hard, when ministry feels heavy, and faithfulness has cost us something?

#### Motivation 3: Christ's Joy Within Us

And the third motivation is **Christ's joy within us**. Christ's joy within us.

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. Likewise, you also should **be glad and rejoice with me**.  
*Philippians 2:17-18.*

Look with me at verse 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. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me"** (Philippians 2:17-18). Now, remember, where is Paul writing from? A prison. From a prison, he's chained up, forgotten by many, but still, he says, "I rejoice." Why? Because he knows his suffering isn't wasted. His suffering is leading others, like the Philippians, to grow in their faith, to cling to Christ, to live with hope. Paul's not joyful because everything is easy, everything is smooth sailing. He's joyful because he sees God using his life for something much greater.

OK, and that joy is what kept him going. So, I'll be honest with you: Some days, ministry is hard. Pastoring is hard. It's not because I don't love what I do. I love what I do. I consider it a privilege to serve this church. But there are days when the weight of people's stories presses so heavily on my heart—stories of broken homes, mental and physical struggles, deep loneliness that people feel, or addictions that they just can't come out of. And in those moments, I feel so inadequate. I wish I had something I could tell them. But now, the only thing I can do, the only thing I get to do, is pray. But then, the Lord is faithful. Something always happens where someone we've been reaching out to walks through the church door for the first time, or someone in our community opens their Bible and says,



"Wow, this is good. I get it now," or a weary heart finds comfort, peace, joy in God's word. And in those moments, I'm reminded how this is worth it—every hard conversation, every late night, every prayer. Because God is working, even though we're weak vessels, God is working through us.

And that's what Paul is saying. He is saying that if my life is to be poured out, if I give everything I've got, if it helps you to walk with Jesus, then I'm glad. I'll do it all over again. And not fake positivity—that's deep gospel joy. Let's be honest: Don't we all want that kind of joy? Because sometimes we forget why we're doing all this. It's not about getting good grades, building platforms for ourselves, or being that perfect Christian where everything is going smoothly, right? It's the joy that Jesus gives. It's about hope. It's about eternal joy that we get to look forward to. We don't serve to earn something; we serve because we've already been given so much. We've been given everything in Christ.

<p>"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." - Augustine</p>
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There's a quote I love from Augustine. He's an early church leader, and he said this: *"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."* That's the truth. We chase so many things in this life—success, relationships, comfort, applause. None of it will last. None of it satisfies for long, but when we rest in Christ, when we live for His glory and serve people whom we love, we find something real—deep joy, joy that no suffering can steal from us. So, let me ask you this: Why are you doing what you're doing? What's driving you? What's your driving motivation at work, or at school, or in your home? If it's just performance or pressure, you'll burn out. You will burn out. But if it's joy—joy that you receive from Him and joy that you get to share with others—if it's the desire to share hope with people around you, then that will carry you.

The cornerstone: Let's fix our eyes on Jesus. Let's hold on to that joy that He gives, and let's live this week with hearts poured out for His glory, because that's a life that shines through. That's a life worth living. And that is a joy that no one or nothing can take away. Amen.

As we've seen today, God is powerfully at work in the ordinary places of our lives, and we've looked at three motivations: God's power in us, God's light through us, and Christ's joy within us. So, let me leave you with a couple of encouragements as you head back into the rhythm of daily life. The first encouragement to you is: Stay rooted in grace. Stay rooted in grace. We cannot earn God's love. We cannot earn God's love. It's already yours in Christ. So, start each day not in guilt but in gratitude. Acknowledge that He is with you.

And second, live faithfully in the little things. Live faithfully in the little things. Spiritual maturity isn't built in big moments, right? It's shaped in the quiet obedience of everyday life—being kind when no one's watching, serving when no one thinks, choosing forgiveness

over unforgiveness, offering hope to people. Even small acts of faithfulness can have eternal impact when done in the name of Christ.

And maybe today, you know, God's tugging on your heart. You've been trying to carry your spiritual life in your own strength, but today, maybe God is calling you, "Lay your burdens on me." I hope you can respond, saying, "Lord, I need you. Help me grow." Or maybe you've never really begun a relationship with Jesus. You know, you've heard the stories, you've seen such joy and wonder in other people's lives. But today, you're ready to say, "Jesus, I want to know you. Forgive me, change me, lead me." If that's you today, please don't leave without talking to me or the leaders here or anyone here who would love to walk with you, to pray with you, and help you take the next step of knowing Him.

Church, God is with you. And God is not only with you today on Sundays; He's with you on your Mondays. He's with you on your errands. He's with you in your ministry. He's with you in your quiet times and the chaotic times. God is working in your life. *Sanctification* is a process, but it's also a promise. He is changing you, and He's not finished with you yet. Hold on to this hope, stay anchored in God's word, shine your light, and let Christ's joy carry you today.

Let's pray.

*Father in heaven, we come before you, acknowledging who you are. You promised us the work you began in us, you will complete it on the day of Christ (Philippians 1:6). So, Lord, I pray as we walk this walk of faith, even in challenge, even in chaos, even in trial, I pray that Christ's presence will fill us, Christ's light will shine through us, and Christ's joy will continue to be the cry of our souls. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*