

“From Start to Finish”

Philippians 1:3-6

Introduction

1. **Happy New Year!** My prayer is that each of us will face this New Year with joy and with full confidence that what God has begun in your life, he will get you across the finish line...not just somehow, but triumphantly.
2. Twenty years ago, in her speech marking the 40th anniversary of her accession to the throne, Q. Elizabeth called 1992– Annus Horribilis– a horrible year.
3. For some of us, 2011 was an Annus Horribilis. And so some face the New Year with a sense of defeat. And still others of us may have a sense of foreboding that 2012 may be an Annus Horribilus for us. And so we are tempted to face the New Year with some trepidation.
4. For all of us here, 2012 will be an adventure into the unknown. And we get to start out this new chapter of our common mission in the Book of Philippians. It’s a short book– 5 pages– I’d like to challenge you to read the whole letter every day for a month and see what God does as you immerse yourself in the Scripture.
5. This section of God’s Word to us came originally in the form of a letter that the Apostle Paul was inspired by God to write to some old friends he had come to know and love during, what may at first have seemed to be a “side-track” on his second mission trip in A.D. 48-51.
6. Paul had thought God was leading him into Asia– he never planned to visit Philippi, but God had other plans. Luke reports that they were “kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.” (Acts 16:6) Paul was responsive to God’s leading to Eastern Europe. There in the Roman colony of Philippi he met an Asian woman, Lydia of Thyatira– a high end fabric merchant & her family.
7. But AD 49 looked as if it might turn out to be an Annus Horribilis. Paul met a Greek slave-girl who was involved in the occult– for whom Jesus broke those chains of bondage to superstition and the demonic. But the life-giving life-changing power of the gospel got Paul into trouble with a segment

of society that made their money by exploiting the vulnerable like this slave-girl. And as result he was stripped and beaten and placed in stocks in a dungeon. Some would say, “Thanks a lot, Lord!”

8. BUT while bound in prison, Paul and his side-kick, Silas, could pray and sing and witness to the other prisoners because of the joy of the LORD and memories of the experiences he had had with the congregation at Philippi.
9. This is how Paul and Silas got to witness to the chief Roman corrections officer who came to know Jesus and his personal Lord and Savior as did his whole family.
10. Now, a decade or so later, Paul has been arrested once again for his faith and shipped off to Rome where he is under house arrest (1:7, 13-14)
11. And he writes under the inspiration of the Spirit of God...(read with me) ***I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*** –this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. ...And I am sure Leith and Charlene would echo this for us in 2012.
12. This section of Scripture comes to us as God’s Word lived out in real-life, real-time to teach me that, yes, there are times and circumstances in life that may overwhelm me. But as a Christ-follower, I can stand against the potential of discouragement and cross the finish line, not just somehow, but joyfully triumphant... By...
 - Cultivating habitual gratitude (1.3)
 - Being intentional about joy (1.4)
 - Fostering a missional outlook (1.5)
 - Holding to a confident expectation (1.6)

Cultivating habitual gratitude (*I thank my God every time I remember you.1.3*)

1. When I was growing up, a loving aunt or grandma or family friend would give me a treat, and after a reasonable pause my Mom or Dad would frequently ask me...”and what do you say?” They weren’t collecting information. As I came to know Mom and Dad, it wasn’t just a matter of trying to teach etiquette—they were trying to foster an attitude of gratitude.

2. Later in this letter we'll see the imprisoned Apostle challenging his dear friends to cultivate a habit of gratitude as he writes, "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving**, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" (4:6) (Did you notice "anxiety" and "gratitude" are mentioned in the same sentence? More about that in the weeks to come)
3. Gratitude is the basis of happiness and of goodness. Ingratitude is the basis of a sense of entitlement and victimology which leads to lashing out...do whatever I want because they "owe" me.
4. Can you think of one **happy** person who is ungrateful? Can you name one **kind** person who is ungrateful?
5. The Apostle is probably not all that encouraged by the outcome of the Roman Justice System that has him incarcerated...not all that impressed with the décor or the menu. But then, that's not his focus.
6. This Scripture teaches me that as a follower of Christ, I can stand against the potential of discouragement and I can cross the finish line, not just somehow, but joyfully triumphant... by cultivating habitual gratitude

And I can cross the finish line, not just somehow, but joyfully triumphant by...

Being intentional about joy (*In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy* 1.4)

1. The Apostle Paul knew that there were problems in the Christian community at Philippi— problems that needed to be tended to. But still, he found things to be grateful for and focused on them. He was intent on rejoicing.
2. Joy doesn't require a lot of stuff to keep a smile. It's not sustained by trinkets and toys and thrills, but by the experience of being forgiven and reconciled with God and knowing that I have a part in His plan because He has given me His Spirit.
3. Joy is not so much a feeling as it is a moral choice. And how I choose to act has an impact on how I feel. Intentional joy reduces tension and eases friction— maybe that's why Isaiah called it the "oil of joy" (61.3).

4. Joy moderates sadness and replaces discouragement with power. Hundreds of years earlier The disheartened exiles returning to a Jerusalem in shambles and unsecured are challenged “don’t be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Neh 8.10)
5. Even though Paul is under arrest for a capital conviction, joy overwhelms him. He had learned that joy & gratitude were not self-centered but God-centered. It was a moral choice– a moral achievement.
6. Paul realizes that all day, every day, how he chooses to act has implications on others. Although imprisoned unjustly, he chooses to act with joy – chooses to express gratitude.
7. Chuck Swindoll says,

“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than success, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company ... a church ... a home, or an individual.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for the day. We cannot change our past ... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude.

I am convinced that life is ten percent what happens to me and ninety percent how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes.”

8. Paul’s biography shows that he had come to see the “bad mood monster” – not as something to just give in to... but get rid of. His choice for dealing with a messy B.M. (bad mood) was to take a good hot spiritual shower so as not to inflict it on others or let it be a constant source of irritation to himself.
9. You see, if Paul sat there in prison comparing himself with James or John or Peter at the moment, he could easily get miserable. Even comparing his situation with his Philippian friends would not turn

out well. He chooses not to do that. He looks over at his sidekick, Silas, Paul realizes he's not exceptional. Other people have it tough too.

10. Some dozen times in this letter “joy” and “rejoice” is in focus
11. Abraham Lincoln said “I have found that most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be”
12. How much fun was it for Jesus when he was unjustly arrested, mocked, beaten, and crucified? In the midst of the unjust suffering Jesus endured leading up to his excruciating death on the cross, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews declares that it was “*for the joy set before him [he] endured the cross, scorning its shame.*” (12.2)
13. So, I can cross the finish line, not just somehow, but joyfully triumphant... by Cultivating habitual gratitude (1.3)...by Being intentional about joy...and by...

Fostering a missional outlook (*because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.* 1.5)

1. The gospel—good news of the rescue God made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus—is a central theme in this letter. Paul brings it up nine times. The Christ-followers at Philippi were living in light of the Great Commission; Cultivating connections for mutual discipleship; fostering growth in and among believers and building bridges to unbelievers. They were adopting a life-style that incarnates Christ. They were demonstrating His glory among the peoples.
2. They realized that **Every** believer is sent **with** the cross **by** Christ **in** community **to** the culture.
3. Paul’s mission to the Philippians was not to enculturate them to be Jewish but to lead them to be Christ-followers in their culture and, in turn, to lead folks in their culture and beyond to become followers of Christ day by day. We’ll see later on in this letter the challenge to live an authentic “counter-culture” including in the areas of prestige and power and possessions and purity.
4. Do I actively look for opportunities to share meaningful, appropriate stories of what Jesus means to me?

5. I can cross the finish line, not just somehow, but joyfully triumphant... by fostering an **outlook** toward my family and friends and acquaintances, toward my neighborhood and community, toward my work...a missional outlook toward the whole of life... and by...

Holding to a confident expectation (*being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. 1.6*)

1. In the mid-1930's a suspension bridge was strung almost 9,000 ft from abutment to abutment across the San Francisco Bay from towers rising 692 ft. above the water. Conventional wisdom at the time predicted that a project like that would cost the lives of some 35 construction workers. But once the cables were strung across the bay, Joseph Strauss, who headed up the project, invested \$130K to build a safety net under the entire bridge and cantilevered out 10' on either side to protect workers who might get caught by a gust of wind and blown off the project to their death. This provision brought a sense of confidence that had the effect of spurring the work on to completion triumphantly— ahead of schedule and under budget. Nineteen workers were saved by the net— they became known as the “halfway to hell club.”
2. The stakes are much higher and the commitment much deeper when it comes to the project God began ages ago of reconciling the world to Himself. And God is absolutely committed to seeing the project through to completion.
3. This commitment by God gives me confidence to face each day...*being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*
4. **What He Began:** Jesus “*came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.*” (Jn 1.11-12)
5. The moment I agreed with God that I was a sinner and needed Him to rescue me...the moment I put my faith in Jesus who took my place on the cross and paid the penalty of my sin, God declared me to be right with Him (**justification**)

6. **He will Complete:** *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^l have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8.28-9)*

7. *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. (1 Thess 5.23-24) (sanctification)*

8. **Until the Day of Christ:** *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 Jn 3.2) (glorification)*

9. *I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

10. There are times and circumstances in life that may overwhelm me. As a Christ-follower, I can stand against the potential of discouragement and cross the finish line, not just somehow, but joyfully triumphant... **By Cultivating habitual gratitude (1.3) Being intentional about joy (1.4) Fostering a missional outlook (1.5) Holding to a confident expectation (1.6)**

7-8 January 2012

© Paul W. Ferris, Jr.