

**AIM**

- To explore what it means for people to “work out” their salvation and “hold out the word of life”.

**EXPLORE**

- *What questions do you have over the Follow-Up from Session 3?*
- Read Philippians 2:5-11
  - *Our attitude “should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (v. 5). What exactly was Jesus’ attitude? He made Himself nothing, became like a servant, humbled Himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.*
  - *Jesus “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” (v. 6). Why not? Verse 5—because He was equal with God; verse 7—because He came to serve.*
  - *Are there any situations in which a Christian needs to “grasp equality with God”? Why or why not? There are no situations in which a Christian needs to do this. After all, “grasping equality with God” is practically the definition of sin (which has at its root ungodliness). In addition, just as Jesus had everything because He is God, so we have everything in Christ. That means we don’t need to live self-centered, “grasping” lives.*
  - *What were the results of Jesus’ attitude, according to verses 9-11? God exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that every knee should bow to Jesus, acknowledging that He is Lord, to the glory of God.*
  - *Having read this passage, how can you live “to the glory of God” (v. 11) this week? Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31*

**LISTEN (DVD)**

*“Shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the Word of Life” (Philippians 2:15-16).*

**Introduction**

Last week, Paul gave us a striking picture of Christ (Philippians 2:6-11). And here, in verses 12-30, Paul tells the Philippians that they are to be transformed by that picture of radical self-sacrifice.

He urges them to do two things. First: “work out your salvation”, and second: “hold out the word of life”.

Then he gives us a brief portrait of two men who’ve done just that.

**1. Work out your salvation (vv. 12-13) – internal and personal (personal growth)**

“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling...” (v. 12). Notice that Paul doesn’t say “work for” your salvation; only Christ can and did work *for* our salvation. He says “work out” your salvation, which means that our salvation should display itself outwardly. It should have a visible, tangible effect on every part of our lives, as we simply obey Christ. We simply begin to work out all the implications of what we have come to believe from God’s Word as a result of our reception of the gospel.

We are able to “work out” our salvation because “it is God who works in [us] to will and to act according to his good purpose” (v. 13). We work out our salvation because God works in us (cf. 1:6). He helps us to do the things he calls us to do. So, we trust His internal working, and we diligently cooperate.

This reality—that God is at work within us—should provoke “fear and trembling” from us. That is, we should engage seriously, reverently, and diligently in this process.

**Application:** Are we testing the promise in verse 13 for ourselves by “working out our salvation”, even if we don’t feel we’re able?

**Application:** Did you notice that Paul says they will need to obey God “not only in [Paul’s] presence” but also in his absence (v. 12)? How good are we at obedience when we are away from church, during the week, in the home or workplace?

- *Think of the best, most likeable unbeliever you know...how are you different? If you can’t really answer that with any substance (more than just “I go to church”), then you’re double-life is in violation of Paul’s exhortations here and Christ’s example previously.*

## **2. Hold out the word of life (vv. 14-18) – external and public (public outreach)**

In verse 16, Paul assumes that the Philippians will “hold out the word of life” (the Greek literally means “hold forth” or “offer”). This means they will be sharing the gospel with their lives and their lips; the gospel must shine from *every* part of our lives, not just from what we say. “Shining like stars” is a powerful illustration that captures how the gospel should affect our interactions with people around us. If they are in spiritual darkness, they should be compelled by the Light that we reflect.

The strength of our witness to others depends upon us doing “everything without complaining or arguing” (what we say and how we say it) and by being “blameless and pure” (our actions) (vv. 14-15). Do we sometimes give people a reason to ignore our witness because our lips, attitude, or lives are not “blameless” (which is why vv. 12-13 precede vv. 14-18—we must work out our salvation so that the message of our life matches the message of our lips)?

- *Give some examples of how this happens. You may want to use this illustration: One person I heard of used to go on business trips with married men who called themselves Christians. And he said that he watched these men going from the brothel on Saturday night to church on Sunday morning. And what he said was: “I did not go to the brothel with them, and I didn’t go to church with them either.”*

If we do live “blameless and pure” lives (vv. 12-13, 14-15a), then we will “shine like stars” in what Paul calls “a crooked and depraved generation” (v. 15).

**Application:** How much do we really stand out from others who are not “children of God” (v. 15)? And if we do stand out, is it for the right reasons? Is it because we’re holding out the word of life and living “blameless” lives?

## **3. Two people transformed by Christ (v 19-30)**

Next, Paul gives us a glimpse of two people who’ve been transformed by Christ in just this way: Timothy and Epaphroditus.

- *You may want to use this illustration: It can be very difficult writing job references for people, especially if they’ve not been very good employees. You’re desperately trying to write the truth without being too hurtful. One of my favourite references for a departing employee was this one: “I am sure he will join your company as he leaves ours: fired with enthusiasm.” Or what about this one: “You will be very fortunate if you can get this man to work for you.”*

Timothy and Epaphroditus worked with Paul for some time. You can read Paul’s job references for them in vv. 19-24 and vv. 25-30. Timothy’s interests are the interests “of Jesus Christ” (v 21). That means taking “a genuine interest” in the welfare of others (v 19), and serving together “in the work of the gospel” (v 22). So, Timothy teaches us that although we may say we have the “interests of Jesus Christ,” we actually don’t unless we are looking out for the “interests of others.”

Then there's Epaphroditus. How might we speak of a Christian friend who had nearly burned themselves out in their efforts for the gospel? Perhaps we'd say they were naive, careless, or even stupid. How does Paul describe Epaphroditus, a man who "almost died for the work of Christ" (v 30)? "Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him" (v 29).

### **Conclusion**

When others look at our lives, do they see people like the ones Paul mentions in verse 21, those who look out for their own interests? Or do they see people like Timothy and Epaphroditus, whose self-sacrificial lives have been radically transformed by Christ, so that they are both looking more and more like Him (vv. 12-13) and offering His life to others (vv. 14-18)?

### **DISCUSS**

- *Was there something in particular that stood out or struck you from the DVD?*
- *In your own words, what does Paul command in Philippians 2:12?*
- *What will it mean in practice for you to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling?"*
- *After the challenge of verse 12, why should Paul's next words inspire confidence in his readers?*
- *In what ways are you aware of God transforming you or other Christians you know?*
- *According to verse 15 and 16, what makes us "shine like stars"?*
- *Which do you think is more necessary: to tell people the gospel or to live a godly life among them? Why?*

### **FOLLOW-UP**

See the document entitled "Session 4 Follow-Up." Please note that these follow-up questions differ from the ones in the *Discipleship Explored Handbook*.