

**We Can Work It Out**  
**By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison**  
**Philippians 2:12-30**  
**Philippians Sermon Series**  
**June 26, 2022 (VBS Sunday)**

People of faith sometimes go to extremes (as can people without faith). For instance, when we talk about salvation, Christians can go opposites. First, it is natural to assume we are saved by our own good deeds. We learn as children we must not fail, lose, or fall short, or we face the consequences. We assume God grades on a curve, too, so we had better perform or we will face His rejection. This leaves us feeling we are never quite good enough to please God and that He is always angry with us about something. On the other hand, some live as if it is our business to sin and God's business to forgive. Neither extreme promotes the mind of Christ. In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul uses the word grace to describe salvation. We do not deserve, earn, or merit God's love. Our good works (deeds, self-effort, or self-righteousness) are insufficient. We cannot do a thing to save ourselves. Instead, God's gracious actions in Jesus Christ save us. We are completely at God's mercy. Scripture is clear that the way of salvation has never been by promoting our own self-righteousness. However, we get to contribute to our salvation. When we abide in Christ, good things naturally follow. Salvation is not just something that happened one-time years ago—it is a continuous and ongoing action now. Birthing a baby is a wondrous thing. However, there is more than just a new birth. The baby must grow and become a functioning adult. Something is wrong when growth does not happen. Paul says to "*work out your own salvation.*" We work it OUT, we do not work it IN. Grace is God's gift to us. We do not work FOR our salvation by striving or achievement. Salvation is not part of a "self-help" improvement course. We do not have to make promises to God that we will clean up our lives so we will be good enough for Him to save us. A drowning swimmer needs a life preserver, not swimming lessons. Working out our salvation is us cooperating with God's love. Because God's power has entered our lives, we can work it out in practical ways. We can become teammates and supporters of Jesus. We can allow God's grace to help us be salt and light in His world. Those who learn to work out their salvation are the ones who enjoy their faith the most. We are not passive in our workout routine. We don't just watch the teacher, we engage. We are active partners. We are "response able." Like the icing on a cake—it "adds to" the final outcome.

APPLICATION: Our memory verse this week is 2:12: *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.* Our theme is **WORK OUT**. First, have you received this precious gift of salvation? Salvation is ours for the asking. Asbury pastors can help you with this. Second, specifically, how are you working for "God's good pleasure"? Again, we can help direct you.

Paul McCartney and John Lennon wrote the song that is our sermon title: *"We Can Work It Out."* Part of it sounds like something the Apostle Paul could have written, *"Life is very short and there's no time for fussing and fighting my friend. I have always thought that it's a crime..."*

In last week's episode of Philippians, we saw where Paul asked the Philippian church to be unified. Indeed, life is very short and fussing and fighting is almost like a crime, especially among followers of Jesus. However, Paul also pleads with the church not only to have unity but also to live with humility. He wrote (2:3b) *...in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* After encouraging unity, "We can Work It Out" is followed by this line, *"So, I will ask you once again - Try to see it MY WAY. Only time will tell if I am right or I am wrong. While you see it YOUR WAY, there's a chance that we might fall apart before too long. We can work it out."* Paul was telling his girlfriend at the time, actress Jane Asher, they could work it out if she would see things HIS way. She must not have seen it Paul's way enough since they broke up. It's from the genre of songs like "I did it MY way."

Many men are like me – we like the music to a song but have no idea what the words are. Few of us actually know what the artist was thinking when the song was written. When we know the history, background, and personal experiences that prompted the song, it has more meaning to us. Many say that the Bible is vital to them but know little of the lyrics. The Bible may sound good, but many/most have a superficial relationship with it. That is why we need to STUDY the Bible. We learn about the author and his audience. We try to understand the language (the Greek language is different from English), the location, and the logic for the letter. Someone said on my last trip to Israel, *"Going to the Holy Land was like watching the Wizard of Oz when it went from black and white to color. This trip has made the Bible come alive."* That trip helps, but we don't have to go to Israel for the Bible to come alive, but that's the point – to help the written word become a living document in us.

Turn in your Bibles to **Philippians 2:12-30 p1165**. (John leads you in vs. 12-18; he reads 19-30). In particular, pay attention to the first verse: **We Can Work It Out."**

*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, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things w/o grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God w/o blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 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. 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. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. 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, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 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. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So, receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.*

1.) **“Work OUT your own salvation”?** WHAT does Paul mean by saying **“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling?”** He did not say, “work FOR” or “TOWARD” salvation, as if there was something more that we needed to do - but we are to work it **OUT**. Salvation already exists but we are to express it.

If Philippians 2:1-11 is my favorite Bible passage as it emphasizes the Lordship of Jesus and how we should respond (unity/humility) as His followers, **Ephesians 2:1-10** is second as it shows the movement of salvation. First, we were all “dead in our sins and trespasses.” Second, we are saved through the merits of Jesus Christ.

<sup>8</sup> *For by grace you have been saved through faith.* <sup>9</sup> *This is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Third, we express our gratitude for our faith by living in ways that help others follow Jesus. We are not saved BY our own good – but we are saved FOR good works. Salvation is not to sit on a shelf like a trophy. <sup>10</sup> *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* Putting salvation into practice is a pleasing response to God. There is more to being a Christian than dying and going to heaven. LIVE out your salvation is probably a better way for us to think of it than WORK out because we think in terms of working FOR it.

2.) **Application: HOW** do we work it out? Paul says DON'T grumble, complain, and dispute. **Do all things w/o grumbling or questioning.** The Israelites grumbled, complained, and disputed Moses (and the Lord) when they left Egypt. When we grumble and complain we express our displeasure with the Lord and that we are not content with our circumstances. It does not please or honor the Lord. It is the opposite of living with praise and gratitude. It is divisive and disrupts unity. Grumbling, pessimism, and negativity are easy HABITS to form.

3.) Then Paul has 2 **illustrations** of people doing good works: Mentoring (Timothy): **For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.** This is a mentoring relationship of Paul with Timothy, who is a young pastor. After July 31 I intend to follow what Paul did with Timothy. Barry Ewy, our SPRC chair, and a # of our governance, have helped me started a 501C-3 nonprofit called “Churchcraft.” *“As the seminary goes, so goes the pastor, as the pastor goes so goes the church, as the church goes, so goes the world.”* (Maxie Dunnam) Asbury's core missional strategy – training pastors in Estonia, Tanzania, Mexico, and at ATS. If a pastor is well, a church can flourish. The opposite is true. It all rises and falls on leadership. I want to

help pastors flourish. Churchcraft is mentoring selected pastors and taking them and their spouses to Israel. I have an office in the new Development Center.

Brother/fellow worker (Epaphroditus): <sup>25</sup> ***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,*** <sup>26</sup> ***for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.*** <sup>27</sup> ***Indeed, he was ill, near to death.*** This is a peer relationship: “brother/fellow worker.” Others helped Paul in ministry.

A delightful part of ministry has been watching the birth of a ministry called “Balcony Women” (either you’re in the balcony or in the basement) and “The Widows Fellowship.” In 2014, Melissa Phenicie told me about something she felt the Lord laid upon her heart –caring for widows. I knew what she was talking about because of my mom’s experience as a widow. Melissa wrote: *"Growing up, I had a community that taught me I was part of something greater than myself. I had people cheering for me. These are called 'Balcony People' because they lift others up. As an adult, I realized not everyone had the same experience. God laid it on my heart to engage my group of Balcony Women to work specifically with widows. I am quiet, and not someone you immediately think of as a 'ministry leader.' But I am learning my purpose is to be a person God can work through. Scripture tells us we are called to defend the widow. This is my part to play."*

HOW are we supposed to work out our salvation? Our mission is “Helping Others Follow Jesus.” If we only study the Bible (which is essential) but never engage in ministry, Bible Study simply becomes a matter of “Helping ME follow Jesus.” You don’t have to be ordained, a preacher or teacher, or on staff, but the will of God for every follower of Jesus is to live out our salvation by doing good. We saw this @ VBS this week. Specifically, how are you Helping Others Follow Jesus now? Where can you get involved in ministry? (The Development Center will have opportunities)

WHY are we supposed to work out our salvation? Jesus told us to. Matthew 5:13-16 *"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Ultimately, we work it out to Help Others Follow Jesus.*