

Glow | How to Glow in the Dark (Philippians 2:12-18)

June 7, 2020 | Matthew McNutt

INTRODUCE MYSELF. THANK EMMA FOR READING SCRIPTURE.

We are in the fourth week of a nine week series going through the book of Philippians that we're calling **Glow**.

God designed us to glow in a world of darkness, to shine brightly for Him. Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians during a time of suffering far worse than anything we've experienced; Christians were being persecuted, the faith was illegal, they were being cut off from families, excluded from business and work opportunities, wondering how they would pay for their next meal, hunted down, imprisoned and put to death. Despite all that danger, uncertainty, fear, lack of security – these every day people struggling to get by in a difficult world were able to have a profound impact that we can look to as an example two thousand years later.

Last week Pastor Nate spoke on Philippians 2:1-11, which was a call to humility for the sake of unity. I heard one pastor talking about Philippians say that it's almost as if Paul was saying, hey – the persecution, the violence, the arrests and deaths, those are all hard – but the hardest thing is learning to be united. This week, we're looking at Philippians 2:12-18, which takes that call, moves it from the personal to the broader picture and our purpose as believers.

Philippians 2:12-18 (NLT) ¹² Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important.

Paul essentially says, you are doing this. Do so even more. It is both encouraging, because he recognizes that they're pointed in the right direction, as well as a challenge – they haven't arrived yet! We must always guard against thinking, I'm good enough, I'm Christian enough. I can take a break, slow down, ease off for a bit, focus on something else.

Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.

Work hard to show the results of your salvation? Some translations say "work out your salvation." Both phrases have caused confusion to some; isn't Paul, the author of this letter, a loud voice for how we don't earn our salvation? Is he hinting that we actually do in this passage? I like the way the NLT handles it, because the phrasing here, "work hard to show the results of your salvation," makes Paul's intent more clear in English.

Paul is saying, if you are a Christian, then your life should shine like Christ! It's not enough to just say the words; a transformed heart must result in transformed actions.

Let me explain it another way. When I was 20ish, I was a vegetarian for a year. Yup. I was. My wife sent me a quote the other day; someone had written, “I’m not a vegetarian because I love animals. I’m a vegetarian because I hate plants.” Think about it. Anyway; I had made the decision to be a vegetarian, but I had made one allowance – if I was a guest of someone and they served meat, I would eat it in moderation. What this meant practically was that I would maybe have a small portion of meat every month or so. And then, after a year of this, I moved in to my aunt and uncle’s basement while attending college. I didn’t think I’d normally be eating with them, so on the first day when they invited me to dinner, I didn’t say anything and ate the food. Same thing the next day. And the next. At that point, I started to get concerned; at the same time, it started to feel a little weird to say, “I’m a vegetarian” when I had been eating meat at their table every day. So I stayed quiet. About a month later I was talking to some friends and telling them why I was a vegetarian – I had philosophical reasons for it – when I suddenly thought, I’ve been telling all these people I’m a vegetarian while eating meat every night at home. And then it hit me, like a ton of bricks – I was genuinely stunned to think this – I wasn’t actually a vegetarian. Ridiculous, right? My words had zero meaning based on my actions.

Paul’s saying the same thing; if God is in your life, your actions should reflect it!

There’s something else going on here as well. The Greek here would have been clear to the Christians receiving this letter; the “your” is not just referring to individuals, it is also corporate.¹ It blends both ideas; individuals and the local church. We are doing this together. The unity we looked at last week is still in play this week. As individuals we need to be shining for God with our actions, and as a church we need to be shining for God with our actions. YOU should be known in your workplace, school, home, neighborhood, club, as a follower of Christ. WE should be known in our region as a beacon for God.

“Obeying God with deep reverence and fear.” This phrase tells us just how important this issue is in Paul’s mind. Glowing for God in this dark world is not something we do casually or lightly. If we actually understand that the God who saved His people is an awesome God, that is overwhelming! It makes everything else small in comparison!

Proverbs 9:10 (NLT) Fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment.

Having reverence for God, taking His will seriously, that is the foundation for having wisdom and knowledge in this world.

Paul continues in Philippians 2:13:

¹ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 107.

¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

If you're starting to get nervous about where this is headed – and it's going to get uncomfortable by – Paul does give encouragement. God is the one doing the working. I don't shine on my own power. This doesn't absolve me – I need to be pursuing God, but if I am, God's working will transform my actions.

I was listening to a podcast recently about a show I like, and one of the actors was sharing about an episode they did. **Ok, fine, it was Battlestar Galactica.** This particular episode was one that had a famous guest star and the episode as a whole stands out as one of the better performances for the entire cast. The actor was explaining that this award winning guest star's performance was so incredible that it brought out the best from everyone as a result. They all upped their game. The presence of a great actor brings out better acting from everyone.

Philippians 2:13 slide. And that's part of the point here; God is doing the work. His presence brings out light! If your life isn't shining, if our church isn't shining, can God actually be present?

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining and arguing,

Do everything without complaining. Do everything without arguing. That is how we shine for God? I am connected through social media to many of you, and have collected a random sampling of your recent posts for us to look at ... **[PAUSE, THEN GO TO RICK ROLL SLIDE]** You just got Rick Rolled. Did you get nervous? Why? If I can't throw it on a screen in church, why is it on everyone else's screen?

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining and arguing, ¹⁵ so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.

I love what Gordon Fee, a theologian, writes about verse 14: **"Paul has clearly 'quit preachin' and gone to meddlin'".**²

[Philippians 2:14-15 slide] Of all the things to single out, Paul goes after complaining! We like to think it's the big things that shine for God, don't we? Complaining, arguing, they're so easy to justify or minimize, but impact so much. When tempted to do so – and we all are – what will you do?

If I'm blunt, or as Gordon Fee puts it, go to meddlin', I have been so uncomfortable with the knee jerk reactions I have been seeing amongst many of us, Christians, our church family, online and in person. Go back, listen to Pastor Nate's sermon again from last Sunday – unity through humility is important! Our nation is in the middle of multiple

² Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 106.

difficult and painful scenarios at the same time. Are you living as a child of God? Shining bright? Or are you more concerned with defending your politics? Your comfort? Your opinion? Is it more important to you to be heard or to hear others?

Are we closing the door to pointing people to Christ online, at work, in our neighborhood, in our family, at our school, because we lack the humility to resist complaining and arguing?

Andy Stanley frequently says that he wants to be known for what he is for, not what he is against. Over and over, Jesus' reputation was for being for the marginalized, those who were suffering, the poor, the abused, the ones without a voice. Who would your friends, coworkers, family say that you are for?

Can you acknowledge the devastation of seeing a person killed without qualifying statements?

Why do we complain about the phrase "Black Lives Matter"? Jesus left the 99 to save the one. Jesus chose the Samaritan. Jesus chose the Leper. Even amongst the disciples, Jesus had the one whom He loved. Over and over the religious people criticized Jesus's love for the marginalized. We are so frustrated when the world paints Christians with a broad brush, stereotyping all of us by the horrific actions and words of a few who misrepresent the faith, but do we do the same thing when we say that the actions of some in these riots negate the message of the majority advocating for change?

When we avoid complaining we stand out like a radiant light. Our gentle spirit declares "Christ is worth it, Christ is better." That gets people's attention.

I want to be known for being light! Not indistinguishable from the crooked and perverse. But that takes work!

¹⁶ Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. ¹⁷ But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy. ¹⁸ Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy.

I think many of us would say that we are willing to lose our lives for God; but He's calling us to more than just being willing to be a martyr, God is calling us to die to our pride, our selfish desires, our need for the final word.

Someday, when all of this is over, and we stand with Christ – will you stand there with Him and be able to look back on your life with pride? Look at how I have been light for you, Christ! Or will it be with discomfort? Shame at the wasted opportunities? The energy spent on complaining, arguing, instead of building the kingdom?

Paul has built three critical connections in this handful of verses:

- God's work and our work are connected (v12-13).
- Avoiding complaining/arguing and shining are connected (v14-15)
- Sacrifice and rejoicing are connected (v16-18).³

Let's rise to the challenge. Let's be known as individuals and as a church that shines like a bright light wherever we are! God is working on each of us; let our prayer be that we would not get in the way of that work!

“We aren't what we ought to be or what we will be one day, but by God's grace, we are not what we used to be!”⁴ – Tony Merida & Francis Chan

Church, there are so many ways in which we shine for Jesus. Let us have the humility to recognize the areas we still need to grow in!

Close in prayer / Glow Title slide

Reminder to join on Facebook Live, Monday 10am

TRANSITION TO COMMUNION

³ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 105.

⁴ Ibid, 107.