

Shine As Lights

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Well, thank you so much, Ted, it's such a privilege to hear those hymns of the faith, the words obviously are so well thought out, put to great music and it connects us to historic Christianity, you know, songs that people have sung for decades, for centuries people have been singing that stuff, and we, in a sense, join the history of Christian worship when we sing those old hymns. Anyway, thank you for that great stuff and I get to take a drink of this today. It's for me this time. It's a big one too. Okay.

Well, first of all too before we get into it, I just wanted to formally thank all of the people who served to help make that conference go last week, the marriage conference. We had over 20 people from our church serving especially in the nursery in the children's stuff, and that allowed 300 adults to be there hearing the messages and the content, and heard lots of reports of people who were very very blessed. So anyway, I just want to really thank you so much because that stuff, it takes an army, it takes a body of people serving for that to go forward and your service is not always recognized or acknowledged but I just want you to know your part in that is huge and that's what makes it possible. So thank you so much for doing that.

Then also I just wanted to encourage you, if you were part of it, we will be sending out videos of the conference soon, as soon as those get edited, we'll let you know, but I'd like to encourage you if you were there, don't let it just pass by. We often kinda have this almost superstitious idea that if I sit under good teaching, it'll just kinda waft over me and I'll magically change, right? And so people always come back to get their fix on Sunday, their emotional fix and think that, oh, I'm imparting some substance called grace into your life, and that just changes you like taking a vitamin, and that's not the way it works. God has called you to believe and obey the truth, right? And it is in that as we work alongside of his Spirit working in us that we actually grow. So that conference will do you no good even though we got a good deal on it, it was a good price for a conference, and you got a book out of it and you got, you know, all this content, it'll do you no good to just acknowledge that it was good, it's got to be put into practice. So anyways, that's my plug for that.

So I read a couple of interesting articles recently. It was on this website called inc.com, that's basically business articles and all this kind of stuff, but this guy named Jeffrey James wrote this interesting article called "Neuroscience says your body and mind get

stronger when you focus on this one thing." So your body and your mind get stronger when you focus on this one thing. He says this, "Most people realize that the mind and body are connected into a feedback loop. 'A healthy mind in a healthy body' is why psychologists and physicians alike recommend sensible eating and regular exercise. Neuroscientists, however, recommend a different approach. Because they know that body-centric lifestyle changes (like diet and exercise) are difficult to maintain, they recommend starting with the mind. And they've identified the one thought that, when regularly focused upon, is most likely to propel your mind and body into an upward spiral." Okay, so there's one type of thinking, one thought to focus on that will propel you into this upward cycle. Any idea what that might be? That thought is gratitude. If you focus on gratitude, it will propel you into an upward spiral, they say.

"Yes, that sounds all crunchy granola," he says. Excuse my reading, I need to focus on these words here, "that sounds all crunchy granola, but there's actually extensive research into the positive mental and physical effect of that specific thought and emotion, according to a fascinating article published by the Wharton Health Care Management Alumni Association." That's a mouthful. "Here are some highlights," from this article, "Gratitude makes you more likely to exercise. It reduces your stress level. It improves your quality of sleep. It increases your emotional well-being," obviously. Okay, this is so obvious, "Gratitude leads to lower depression and higher levels of social support making you less likely to consider suicide." Okay, that seems pretty obvious, right? "It makes your heart stronger and healthier, and it makes you a more effective leader." Isn't that interesting? You focus on this one thought and it affects your entire body, it affects your entire life, this attitude of gratitude.

Interestingly, from the same website there was another article written by another guy named Jeff, Jeff Haden, and he says this, this is the title, "Neuroscience says you'll be happier, less stressed and more productive when you stop doing this one thing." So if you start with gratitude, okay, that'll make you better, that'll make you stronger, that'll make you healthier, this one says you'll be happier, less stressed and more productive if you stop this. He says, "You can improve your mood and your outlook and train your brain to think this way by refusing to do one thing that most people can't resist." Most people can't resist this thing. He says, "Practice doesn't make perfect. Neither does perfect practice (even if Vince Lombardi actually did say it does). But deep deliberate practice, a form of training that involves concentration, effort, and a steady stream of critical feedback, can help improve any skill up to 10 times faster than conventional practice." Okay, so basically you could sit over there at a piano and just bang on the keys and do the same thing over and over and there's a limit to how much better you'll get at playing the piano. You have to be very very focused and deliberate in your practicing, right, to improve.

He says, "Practice with that level of focus and your brain forms myelin, a microscopic neural substance that adds considerable speed and accuracy to thoughts and movement. Myelin is kind of like a muscle, except instead of strengthening your body, it strengthens neural pathways related to particular skill." Okay, so it strengthens your neurons.

"That's great, but then there's this: Your body doesn't make value judgments." Okay, your body doesn't decide whether one thing is good or bad, it just reacts to what you practice. So he says, "Practicing something that isn't good for you will also alter your brain. Neural networks are built on synapses, small gaps at the end of neurons that allow electrical or chemical signals to pass from one neuron to the next. That's how nerve cells connect with each other. Every time a charge is triggered, the synapses move microscopically closer together to decrease the distance and therefore the lag time." So essentially it's increasing the speed at which you think in a particular direction, in a particular habit. These neurons get closer together as you practice, it's like muscle memory, it's building highways in your mind toward what you are trying to get to.

So it says, "The result is a virtuous cycle if you're trying to learn a helpful new skill, and a vicious cycle if you regularly do something less positive. Like complaining. Think of it as a bizarre version of the Law of Attraction: Complaining will cause you to 'attract' more experiences you can complain about (except this phenomenon is based on science, not philosophy)," he says.

"Complain, and over time it's easier to be negative than to be positive. Complain often enough and complaining can become a default behavior. This is one reason why some people seem to always be able to find something to complain about." You see, the brain adapted to the character and made it more easy for you to practice that which you had set your heart to do, to where it just gets easier and easier and easier and your brain goes right along with it.

So people say that this is one reason why it's easy to find something to complain about, "They'll say they're perfectionists." I'm just a perfectionist, that's why I complain all the time. "They'll say they just have extremely high standards. But really, they've just learned to complain. And trained their neural pathways to be really good at complaining." They put all the thoughts together just like that. They don't even have to think about it anymore, it's just, "Okay, how do I bring all the thoughts together to find something to complain about in a way that really makes sense and is really effective?" Boom, your brain just does it now, right? You have trained it.

He says this, "Venting won't make you feel better. Science says so. I know what you're thinking: When you're mad, upset, frustrated, etc., releasing those negative feelings helps you feel better." In fact, it was very popular among psychologists in the 70s and 80s that you would take a pillow and if you were angry, and you just beat that thing up thinking that that would help you because you're releasing these negative emotions. Science says they're wrong.

"Science says that whining about your problems actually makes you feel worse, not better." As if we needed science to tell us that.

"As my colleague Jessica Stillman writes, grumbling, venting, and expressing dissatisfaction doesn't help. According to one study, venting just makes you feel worse: In fact, the more participants vented the worse they felt their day had gone. And those

negative feelings last." It carries on. "As the researchers write, '[Participants] not only reported lower momentary mood and less satisfaction and pride with the work they'd been doing that same day ...but they also tended to experience lower mood the next morning ...and lower pride in next-day accomplishments.' And if that's not enough, those feelings affect the people around you. If, as Jim Rohn says, you are the average of the five people you hang out with," Jack says this a lot, "Show me your friends, I'll show you your future." "You are the average of the five people you hang out the most with and if one or two of those people tend to complain a lot, research shows that their bad mood affects yours. Just as yours affects them. Which should be the last thing you want to do to people you care about."

So he says, "So instead of complaining.... How you react -- to anything -- is a choice." Alright, and he goes on and he says stuff like friends don't let friends whine, friends help friends make their lives better.

Okay, wow, who knew that gratitude would be good for you, right, and that complaining was bad for you? Who knew that? I mean, isn't that amazing that your thinking has such an effect on your health? And of course, we're not saying that sickness and disease are all caused by bad attitudes, this is me talking now, I'm not reading the article anymore, but it is amazing the impact that your attitude has on your brain and your body, and your brain accommodates your attitude and it makes it easier for you to go down that same path over and over again. And it is kind of cool to think that focusing on gratitude and eliminating complaining can improve your life, but did you really need a neuroscientist to tell you to do that? To convince you that you should put off gratitude, or put on gratitude and put off whining?

Let me ask you this: after hearing those things, are you suddenly now more motivated to give thanks, to be, to have gratitude? Are you suddenly now more motivated to put off complaining after hearing those articles? Why was it not enough for you that the word of God already commanded you that? Why was it not enough for you that God has already said this over and over? What is it that motivates you? If those articles motivate you to put off complaining and put on gratitude more than God telling you so, what does that say about your value system? Where is your authority? What is your motivation?

As a side note, do you see why scientific approaches might be helpful but are totally insufficient? They're completely devoid of any relationship to God. They might practice a form of gratitude but it's the kind that rejects God and this might make you feel better but if it's not gratitude towards God, it's idolatry, the idolatry of self which is the sickness of the soul that caused this whole mess in the first place. You see, for the Christian there's a far higher motivation for putting off complaining and putting on gratitude and we'll talk about that from the book of Philippians 2. I want to go to Philippians 2 and we're gonna read verses 12 through 18. Philippians 2:12-18. Please follow along as I read. I'm gonna read in the English Standard Version just because I like it. So it'll be a little bit different than some of yours. He says, the Apostle Paul writing,

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, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 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, 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. 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. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Let's pray as we go into the word of God.

Father, we come to you as the Maker of all things, the Ruler of all things. You know how our bodies work and you know what's best for us and you always have, and as science and studies prove you to be right over and over and over again, Father, we acknowledge you as our authority, we acknowledge you as the one who knows all things and who has designed all things and, Lord, we come to you to submit our will to yours, and so, Father, I pray that as we come, that your word would inform us and convict us and direct us, correct us and shape us into that which is pleasing in your sight, that together we would glorify you, Father. We pray that you would allow each heart to be willing to receive your word today. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So this passage was written by the Apostle Paul likely around 60-62 AD. Paul has been imprisoned in Rome for preaching the Gospel after angering the Jews in Palestine. They got mad at him for preaching the resurrection, preaching Jesus, and so they had him imprisoned in Caesarea and Paul appealed to Caesar and he got sent to Rome, and of course, this is at the height of the Roman Empire. The Emperor Nero is on the throne and he demands that all Romans worship him as a deity and at the same time, the Jews in Palestine are notoriously restless and are beginning to start another revolt against the Romans, they did this several times, wanting to cast out the Roman rule. It would eventually fail and finally in AD 70, the temple and Jerusalem will be completely destroyed, and so times that this in this era are particularly volatile and Paul has been persecuted repeatedly throughout his ministry by both Jews, Greeks, Romans, pagans, he's been persecuted by all of them for preaching Christ and he's under house arrest in Rome and the church in Philippi, which had been planted by Paul some 10 years earlier, of course, it began when Paul had preached the Gospel to a woman named Lydia, they had a prayer meeting out by the river and she gets saved, a Gentile woman, she gets saved and then Paul ends up casting a demon out of a demon-possessed girl who had been telling fortunes, and her masters were making all kinds of money off of what this demon was able to do through her, so when Paul cast her out, cast out the demon, she was no longer able to do this which made them very angry and they ended up falsely accusing Paul and they threw him in prison in Philippi. And it was during that time that he and Silas were singing out to the Lord in the middle of the night and an earthquake struck and all of the prisoners were free and the Philippian jailer thought, "Oh great, they've all

gotten away," and he went to kill himself when Paul and Silas said, "No, we're all here." So he bends his knee and says, "Brothers, what must I do to be saved?" They say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. So he did, he believed, his entire household believed and they were all baptized. Lydia's entire household believed, they were all baptized and they were likely still in this church 10 years later. They saw Paul suffer for them and they were engaged in much of the same suffering.

So in this particular city, the religious background was a syncretistic blend of all kinds of pagan deities with just a little bit of Jewish influence. There wasn't even enough people there to have a synagogue, you had to have 10 Jewish men to have a synagogue. They didn't have enough there so there was no synagogue in Philippi so the Jewish influence was very small there, but the one thing that would have been dominant in the city of Philippi was Emperor worship because Philippi was a proud Roman colony, and there was such animosity in the city towards Jews and Christians, remember the Jews were always trying to revolt against the Romans, and Christians were saying, "No, our loyalty is to Christ," and then, of course, he preaches and takes away their economic benefit when that slave girl gets the demon cast out, and so they hated the Christians there. It was a very difficult place to live and to be a believer and they were enduring suffering for a long time as a result but now their beloved Paul was in prison and they were concerned about him and they had sent Epaphroditus to go minister to his need and that's how Paul came to write the letter of Philippians. They were concerned even in the midst of their own suffering. They were concerned about Paul's suffering so they sent one of their best guys, Epaphroditus, to go minister to his need.

So he goes, he takes gifts with him and he goes to find out how Paul is doing, and then Paul, obviously very grateful for their love for him, sends Epaphroditus back with this letter, the book of Philippians. And of course, Epaphroditus would have reported to Paul all that was going on there, the suffering that they were enduring, but that also that there were conflicts among the people in the congregation; that there was complaining, there was grumbling; that there were disagreements between a couple of the women who had worked side-by-side with Paul in the ministry of the Gospel, they were bickering and arguing, and so Paul writes the book of Philippians both to thank them for their service to him and then also to address these issues that came up.

Now Paul really loved this church in Macedonia and he highly prized and valued them. As you saw, as you look at chapter 1, in fact, I'll go ahead and read this to you, Philippians 1. Paul says this in verse, let's see here, 3. He says,

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

And he just loved this church and he bragged about them and, in fact, in 2 Corinthians 8, he talked about how generous the Macedonian church was. Macedonia was the area of Greece where Philippi existed. And he said this, he wrote this to the Corinthians about them,

1 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. [Okay, generosity in the midst of extreme poverty.] 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- 5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

So you get a sense of the character of these people: selfless, giving out of their poverty to supply the needs of the suffering saints in Jerusalem. There was a famine in Jerusalem perhaps brought on by persecution, they were isolated and they, people couldn't make it economically so Paul was making a collection for them. This was prior to his imprisonment, and he was gonna take it to them and the Philippians stood out and the Macedonian churches stood out for their generosity. As a side note, biblical stewardship starts with generosity. It starts with generosity, not with stability, not when you've got all your ducks in a row. Biblical generosity starts with caring about the needs of others. The reason you're in debt is because of greed, not because of generosity.

The Philippians exemplified this sincere concern for the needs of others and this was one of the reasons that I said why Paul wrote to thank the Philippians, because of their generosity and to reassure them of his well-being and to reassure them that God would supply all of their needs. And it's really kinda cool, too, is 50 years after this, 50 years after this was written, after Paul is dead, the Philippian church, we see them show up in church history taking care of this guy, this church father named Ignatius of Antioch, and he had been imprisoned and was on his way, I think it was to Rome, and they showed the same character in its care for Ignatius as he was on his way under a military guard on his way to Rome. What a neat testimony that this church had.

So Paul loves this church but he also knows that they're going through some challenging times. Philippians 1:28 says that they had faced frightening opponents. They were granted to suffer for the sake of Christ and they were engaged in the same conflict that they had witnessed in Paul. You see, Paul endured all kinds of beatings and imprisonments and opposition and they were engaged in the same conflict. They witnessed it happen and now they were left there in the city of Philippi facing those same opponents on a day-in, day-out basis, and Paul knows that they're enduring these things. And guess what happens when things get hard? People can start to turn on each other when there's suffering, when there's challenges. I mean, think about this, when a football team starts to lose, right, that's when people start pointing fingers. They say the best cure

for division in the locker room is winning. If you win, everything seems to be going fine, right? When you start to lose and things get hard, people start to turn on each other, start to blame each other, and so then bickering starts and people go into survival mode and then it's every man for himself. You can start questioning each other's motives. You can start questioning your leader's wisdom and motivation. Things get a little dicey.

So Paul has heard about these things from Epaphroditus who they had sent to him, and that these divisions were forming and so he writes to confront these issues. So we come to this passage and while Paul could have given them, you know, he could have told them to stop fighting, he could have told them that they should, you know, that they should stand up for their rights in the midst of this society, that they should demand that they be treated a certain way, "You don't take that from people. You've gotta set boundaries." He could be doing that. He could've told them to raise a rebellion against the rulers of their town against the Romans and against the leaders, but instead he gives them this command, Philippians 2:14,

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing,

Do all things without grumbling or disputing. How can he say this knowing what they're going through? Knowing they're impoverished? Knowing that they're facing challenges? Knowing that people are mistreating one another? How can he say to them, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing"? Doesn't he know what they're going through? Doesn't he understand how hard it is? Well, he certainly does. He's personally experiencing it. He's personally experiencing. He's in prison for these very things and, as he said in chapter 1 which you can go and read later, he talks about how his imprisonment has emboldened some people to preach the Gospel which he was happy about, but some of those people that were preaching the Gospel were doing it in order to cause him trouble, sort of in competition with him, to put him down, to make him look like a fool. He knew what it was like to have friends turn on him. In fact, there's other places, later in a couple of years, he will write to Timothy that, "Everyone in Asia has abandoned me." That, "No one was with me when I stood before on trial. No one stood with me." He knew what it was like and yet he says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing."

How can he say this? We've gotta examine this command a little bit. This word for "grumbling," you're gonna like this word, "goggysmos." It even sounds like what it means, right? Goggysmos. It means "complaining or murmuring." It literally means "an utterance made in a low tone of voice." One lexicon put it this way, it's "behind the scenes talk," and it's used of, and it can be used of good things as well, where they're murmuring, they're just talking behind the scenes, but in this context it's talking about grumbling dissatisfaction at disappointed expectations. You don't like what's happening so, "[murmuring] Can you believe this? [murmuring] Hey, did you hear about.....? [murmuring] What are we gonna do about this guy?" Right? There's grumbling, there's muttering. It's used of the Israelites in Exodus 16, Numbers 17:5, 17:10, and basically where in the wilderness they were grumbling about the food, they were grumbling about the fact that Moses was the leader, and they grumbled against him and like, "Oh, who made you leader, Moses? We're wandering around in this wilderness, in the desert, with

nothing but this manna to eat. We have to rely on God every day." And they turned against him. That's the sort of grumbling that was going on. You can go read about it, but the Lord wasn't happy with that, right? 1 Corinthians 10, it says they were destroyed by the Destroyer.

It's a destructive influence, this grumbling. It rumbles out, it has ripple effects. It doesn't come from love. It doesn't come from trust. It doesn't come from humility. It comes from a sense of expectations, proud expectations, and when you don't get what you want, rather than dealing with it head-on in a faithful godly way, like if someone sins against you, you go to your brother one-on-one, you go talk to everybody else to draw followers after your opinions. That's how democracy works basically, right? Get as many people on your side as you can. That's why we're not the typical Baptist congregational rule. That's the most divisive form of leading on the planet, really. And in a country, it's a good thing because it keeps us from veering too crazy in one direction, right? Us being, you know, the division of the power keeps it from moving too quickly towards a destructive path. But in a church, every church that I've seen that has been democratically ruled are full of divisions because you have to get people on your side and so you go around whispering, and that's what the Proverbs says, "The whisperer, he separates intimate friends." We're whispering, that's like kindling on strife.

So he says here, "Do all things without grumbling," the second word is "disputing." It can have a wide range of ideas ranging from evil thoughts to anxious reflections to doubts, just reasonings, disputes and arguments, and that last meaning about arguments, that's probably the best fitting for this context because it's used along with grumbling. So it seems that based on what Paul says in chapter 3, verse 1, that there were, or verse 2 and following, that there were divisions and divisive doctrines and speculations being introduced, and that the Philippians, to some degree, were engaging in these things and the result was a futile argument that produced disunity.

If you go to Titus 3, you can see how Paul says, "Hey, stay away from quarrels and dissensions and things that are useless, useless arguments." You guys see this, right? You ever play a board game, you ever play Monopoly? How many of you are just passionate about Monopoly? Who wants to be here and just be like, "Hey, I'm a Monopoly champion and that's my whole identity," right? How many of you have played Monopoly? Okay. How many of you have gotten in arguments around a Monopoly game? Look at that, see? You didn't care about Monopoly until someone put it on the table and said, "This is the game we're playing," right? So we're having these arguments over this useless thing. Okay, now that's fun and that's not, hopefully you ask each other's forgiveness and, you know, you returned everyone's money and all that kind of stuff, but when you introduce these speculations that go on behind the scenes and you guys start going around and arguing about speculations, spiritual speculations, "What are the angels doing?" You know, "Is there an angel in this pulpit? What do you think?" Right? And then we argue about that. That's useless, right? That's useless. It's not revealed to us. These are disputes and arguments that are completely pointless and do good for no one. That's where Titus says, "You need to be concerned about the things that lead to good works." We are to avoid futile arguments that produce disunity.

In 1 Timothy, Paul says in chapter 2, verse 8, "I desire then in every place that men should lift holy hands without anger or quarreling." Interestingly, the same word is used in Luke 9:46, it says, "An argument arose among the disciples as to which one of them was the greatest." They're arguing about who's the greatest, which one was going to be first in line, who was gonna sit on the throne next to Jesus. That's another one of those useless, proud arguments.

So that is the definition of the command here. We're not to grumble and we're not to dispute. We're to do everything without grumbling or disputing. Now look at the scope of this command. How often, in what area are we supposed to avoid grumbling or disputing? Everywhere. Everything. In everything. "Do everything without grumbling or disputing." We're to never allow it to be part of our thinking or what comes out of our mouth and part of our conversation.

News outlets make their living on this stuff, grumbling about... I mean, isn't it amazing, you watch these things, they only say the stuff that gets people fired up. That's divisive. We're not to be like that. We're only highlighting the negative things, the things that cause trouble, and we get people fired up and then you have these protests in Oregon between these far-right wacky people and the far left, both violently hating one another because they keep filling their mind with these disputes and these dissensions and these useless arguments and this grumbling about society against one another. Paul says here, "Do everything without grumbling or complaining."

There's a couple of other things that Paul says in this book using the same word for "everything," chapter 3, verse 8, he says, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and that I might count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." In chapter 4, verse 4, he says this, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." So rather than grumbling or complaining, we should in every single thing that we do, that needs to be absent and instead there needs to be rejoicing in the Lord always. There's no room for not always, right? This is to always characterize us.

Philippians 4:5 says, "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything," that word for everything, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Okay, so does it mean you're supposed to pretend like things aren't hard? No, that's not what this is saying. To not grumble is not to pretend like everything's great, but here is your outlet, rather than being anxious which, again, how many of your dissensions and how many of your arguments come out of anxiety about what's gonna come in the future, about what's happening right now? Husband and wife, how many of your arguments come over some anxious decision? How much of your anger towards government officials has to do with fear about the future instead of allowing that to produce grumbling and disputes, how about you let that produce prayer and supplication and make your request known to God with thanksgiving? That is the outlet for those anxieties

and fears, not taking it upon yourself to destroy the character of another person or to control the outcome of the situation through ungodly underhanded means.

Paul says in chapter 4, verse 2, "I know how to be brought low, I know how to abound in any and every circumstance. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." I can do all things through him including not grumbling, including facing every trial and circumstance without disputing, including rejoicing always. You can do all of these things through Christ who strengthens you. Is that you? Does that describe you? Does that characterize you? Is that how your family would describe you as thankful, rejoicing, content, humble, or are you grumbling and murmuring and disputing behind the scenes? You go home and you rip people to shreds in your living room, in the car on the way home? What characterizes you? What characterizes your communication? How do you think about the things that you interact with in your life? How do you think about your wife? Your husband? Your kids? In your heart?

I may have used this illustration before but, you know, when you have an argument, when there's a big blow-up, something terrible and you say terrible things to each other, that's like the live concert, right, and it's all full force. The lights are on, every instrument is brought to bear to just focus all of your energy on that performance, but those songs that you're singing in that moment have been rehearsed many times. What is it that you rehearse to yourself in moments of inconvenience? What is it that you rehearse to yourself when you interact with someone that you don't have a lot of respect for? What do you think about them? What is your attitude towards them? What do you rehearse when you have to deal with an incompetent boss or employee? Is it grumbling in your heart? Is it arguing in your heart?

Paul says you should do nothing, with everything you do, you should do everything without grumbling. Are you characterized by rejoicing, contentment, reasonableness, prayer and a willingness to suffer loss for Christ? Or are you characterized by grumbling, complaining, arguing, discontent, self-will, and an unwillingness to suffer? Are you angry? Depressed? Bitter or resentful? Then you need to take heed to this command. You need to take heed.

Now what is it that motivates us to obey? How in the face of all this pressure and trouble that we deal with in this life, how can we obey this command because when you examine it, "You want me to do everything without grumbling or complaining? Literally everything? How is that even possible? You want me to rejoice in everything? How is this possible?" Look at verse 12 of the same chapter, chapter 2, verse 12. It says,

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

Have you ever noticed that when someone with authority comes into the room, that often grumbling and useless arguing stops? I notice that with my kids, right? They're arguing about something, you walk into the room and they're like... because they know. They know. That illustrates how much self-control you actually have, right? Your fear of man is stronger than whatever you wanted in that moment. When your boss walks in, you all of a sudden stop complaining to your co-worker, person on the other side of the cubicle. When the pastor walks in. I'm pretty sure I don't know you people very well because y'all act different around pastors. It's true. People seem to realize that there are other things that they should be doing other than grumbling and complaining when someone in authority walks into the room and they start, they get to work. It was this way in high school when the teacher would give you an assignment and then they would leave the room, you know, people start whispering and talking and goofing around and then all of a sudden the teacher would come in and it would quiet down and get back to work. It was the same on the football field. You were more focused when your coach was there watching the drill. It was the same when I worked at Starbucks, when the manager was working that day. When I worked at Farmers Insurance. When my wife walks in the room. "I was day-dreaming. I should be doing something." Right? "Oh yeah, I was supposed to vacuum."

Well, Paul says here in verse 12 that we are just as they were to be obedient when he was there, they should even be more so when he's absent and, in fact, that they should do the work that accompanies salvation with a certain sense of fear and trembling, okay? There's a focus in fear and trembling. There's a reverence. There's a humility absorbed in that. They should be careful and focused to do what they're supposed to do. Why? Because even though Paul was not present among them, working among them, someone infinitely higher than him was there working among them and verse 13 says "it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

So God is there working in you. God is present. It should make no difference between whether a boss is present with you or not because the one with the higher standard is always there with you and he is not only there watching, he is working in you. If you were to realize that this is the case, that God is there in you, with you everywhere, would your attitude change if you were aware of that? Why is it that if your boss shows up that your complaining tends to stop but knowing that God is there doesn't have the same effect on you? It's possible you might have a very self-centered view of God, that he is your slave to accomplish your will, and if you push the right buttons, he'll give you the Snickers bar that you want.

He is the Lord of all creation and he is at work in you, and look at what he says there, he is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure, literally to desire his good pleasure, to desire to do what he wants. That is what he is accomplishing in your life and in your heart. And to work, it says there, that's the same as to achieve. So God is producing in you the desire to please him and the ability to achieve that, okay? By his grace, so that means that you can keep the commands of God on your life to do everything without complaining or arguing.

So what is the purpose of this command? What is the problem with grumbling? Of course, we could talk about how it comes from not trusting God that he's in control, that you grumble because you don't believe God is good, and that's true. In your grumbling, you question God's goodness, you question his control, his sovereignty, his right to do as he pleases, but today I want to focus on the reasoning that Paul gives in this passage. Let's read it again, Philippians 2:14. I want this to stick in your mind.

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 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, 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.

I want to give you two reasons from this passage. 1. The number one reason why you should not grumble or complain is because you have a calling. You have a calling. Do you know what your calling is? Do you know what you're called to do? Do you know why you are here? God has given you and your specific family, he's given that family to you, he's given you your job, he's given you the neighborhood that you live in at the time period of history that you currently exist. He has given this to you and he has called you to this for a purpose and what is that purpose? Look at the end of verse 15, to shine as lights in the world. You are called to shine as lights in the world. You are called to showcase the glory of Christ through your conduct among unbelievers. This isn't a call to showcase your own self-righteousness. This is not a call to obey God so he can give you everything you want, the happiest home that you want, the nice yard and the big house and accomplish all of your dreams. That's Disney's job. Then you die, so what? You fulfilled your dreams, right? God has called you to a very specific temporary purpose in this world and that is to be a light among the Gentiles.

The word "lights" here is used of torches and lanterns and harbor beacons, especially stars in the night sky. It's used of all of those things and Paul is saying here that you must shine like that in the world. Light gives truth, it gives direction, it directs you to safety. The stars at night in the ancient world were the primary means of navigation. You shine as lights in the world. You are like a harbor beacon showing people where they will find safety from the wrath of God, showing them the truth of who God is, of who Christ is, how to be saved. You must give that light of truth to those who are perishing.

Jesus says in Matthew 5 that you are the light of the world. "A city 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. 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." Now you are not to do your works, as he says later on in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew there, you're not to do it in order to impress men with how great you are, but you are to do your works before a watching world so that they may glorify God. How much is that on your mind when you are at work complaining about your boss? When you're at work starting arguments? When you are in your house with your windows open screaming at your spouse for your neighbors to hear? When you grumble and complain, instead of carrying

out the torch of the word of life, it's like throwing water on it. It's like cloud cover over the night sky and people who should be able to know that you belong to God by your conduct, and I can go find answers for how to be saved, for how to deal with the problems of my life, I should be able to go to these people but look at them, they're in their house screaming at each other. Look at them slandering their boss. Look at them putting down their employees. Look at them, they can't even get along. Obviously they don't know God. They can't help me. Your role in the world, the reason you are left here is not so that you can live forever on this planet with a nice house and a picket fence and the dog that doesn't shed, right? There's a much bigger call on your life, a much bigger call.

1 Peter says this in chapter 2, verse 9,

9 ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

This is the reason why we're to be subject to the governing authorities, wives submissive to husbands. As he goes on in 1 Peter, be subject to governing authorities, be slaves at that time, even be subject to your masters, even the ones who are unjust. Why? Because you are a light to the Gentiles. Through your example this person might be saved. This is much bigger than this life.

This is why wives are to submit to unbelieving husbands. Why? By their conduct this unbelieving husband might be won to Christ without a word by their chaste and respectful behavior which is precious in the sight of God. This is how women who hoped in God used to submit to their husbands. Your hope is in God, not in this life, not in this best life now. This is why husbands are to be patient even with an unbelieving wife, to live in understanding, in an understanding way with her, to show her honor. And just as a side note, the submissive thing is a real easy clear-cut thing, right? Submit to your husband. He wants you to do this, you do it. That's easy. Husbands loving your wives, that is a much higher call and it's easy to focus on, oh, it's easy to spot when the wife is not doing her part but the husband, you are so concerned about the wife submitting to you and yet what do you do to love your wife? To lay your life down for her? That is the direction and that is the call and that is how you showcase Christ to a dying world as a husband who loves his wife because that is not what the world does. Who lays down his life for her, stop being so concerned about whether she submits to you. Why don't you love her? Why don't you submit, why don't you serve her? Why don't you lay down your life for her sake every day? That's your call and that is how we showcase Christ.

When we grumble and complain against one another, against our neighbors and against our authorities, we pour water on the torch of the Gospel, we put out that beacon of light and hope, we put clouds over the stars that should direct people to Christ.

Now there are four aspects I want you to consider in this calling. First, it's your character is the focus. The reason that you don't grumble is because you want to be above reproach, blameless, not giving unbelievers a reason to doubt your integrity. This is repeated many times that you be blameless, innocent, children of God in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. That second word in there, so blameless means above reproach, they can't blame you for anything, the second word is innocent which literally means unmixed, it means you're sincere, you're not double-minded, you're not double-tongued, you don't say one thing and do another, you're not duplicitous. You are sincere. When you speak, it is the truth, it is honest. You aren't a hypocrite. So we're to be blameless, innocent, and without blemish, meaning without fault. We are to aim for this because we represent Christ.

So focus on character. 2. Remember your identity. It says there that you are children of God. That means you belong to him. That means you imitate him. It means you represent him. Okay, when my kids act out, I get blamed, right? When my kids act like they own the place, the finger goes to me, right? You are children of God. When you act out, when you are hypocritical, when you are insincere, when you are worldly, when you're off getting drunk, when you're throwing tantrums and flipping people off on the highway with your bumper sticker about, you know, what church you go to and your stick figure family, you might as well be pointing that finger at God because that, they won't remember you, they'll just remember Christians are hypocrites. Remember your identity. You're a child of God. That means we should behave like him and the more that you are like God, the brighter you will shine like the stars.

So focus on character, remember your identity, 3. beware of your context. There it says that we live in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. Crooked meaning dishonest, twisted, it's perverted, it takes God's straight way which is very straightforward and it twists it and it perverts it and it goes off the track. That is the culture in which we live and you exist in this culture to give light to it, and this crooked and twisted generation is that dark sky in which we shine. The ungodly are deceitful and insincere, manipulative, hateful and hating one another, Titus 3 says, led away by various lusts and pleasures. Instead of being like them, we are to stand out as different not just for the sake of being different but for bringing the light of the Gospel to them.

4. Cling to your hope. We're to hold fast to the word of God, it says there. The Gospel of your salvation, this is what you cling to. When you came to Christ, what do you think it was? You came for the promise of eternal life found in Christ. We don't have to hold onto this life. You are going to die. Do you understand you will die? All of your holistic treatments and all the surgeries that you're doing will not prevent it, and that's fine, go do that, right? But it's not gonna prevent your death. You will die. Our hope is not in a comfortable long life but it is the fact that we hold firm to the word of God, the Gospel of our salvation, the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ and that is the torch that we hold

out to the world. And if that is your hope and that is your priority, then you will put up with foul treatment from unbelievers, you will be patient with your wife and your kids, you will treat your employees with respect. Why? Because you don't want to be the cloud that covers the stars of the sky. You don't want to be the pail of water dumped on that torch. You want to get out of the way so that the Gospel can shine. That is the hope that the world needs.

Okay, I just need to acknowledge right now, it is 12 o'clock and I have some more things to say so I'm going to keep going and your stomach will be okay. Alright.

Reason 2, reason 2, right? So number 1, you have a calling. That's why you should avoid grumbling and complaining. Number 2, you have a future, the day of Christ. Verse 16 says this, "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." Isn't it interesting to see here, Paul, he is so concerned about the possibility that he may have labored in vain. This happens in Galatians. This happens in Corinthians, Thessalonians. He is concerned that he will have labored in vain. Think about this, what was it that Paul was running for and laboring for? He was going all over the Mediterranean world taking the Gospel with him into terrible places, getting beat up for it, so that people would be saved and that a strong faithful body of believers would become like a beacon of light in that region. It's like he's going around lighting the beacons in all of these towns and cities all over the Mediterranean world.

That was what he was working for and Colossians 1 says, "I labor and strive to present every man complete in Christ." That's what he worked so hard for. It's like this, there's gonna come a day in which we stand before the Lord and we will present our ministry to him and Paul, he says here, "I want to have reason to exult, to be exhilarated that here you are with me on the day of judgment having lived a blameless life and brought other people to Christ. I want to stand there and be so happy at the faithfulness that you demonstrated through your life, and that I labored in order to help you get there and I had a part in that. I want to do that."

It's like this marriage conference, right? It was, we had it with about a week left we had 200 registrations, right, and we worked and we labored and there was strife, right, to get the word out there, and everyday I'd get the email every time someone registered, right? Email, "Oh, someone signed up. Great." So 100 people signed up within the last few days. It was exhilarating. It was like, "Wow, this is great! How are we gonna take care of all those kids?" Right? But this is awesome, right? There's a sense of exhilaration when you labor and strive and then there's fruit to your efforts, and even beyond that what is so exhilarating is when the word of God makes an impact on someone's life and they change as a result and they are more faithful in their cause because of it.

And that is what Paul wants, he wants to be there on the day of Christ Jesus knowing and seeing that all that he had labored for and all that he had worked for, that they were faithful in their witness; that they did not dishonor Christ; that they did not defect; and that they did not peter out and then collapse in on top of each other with the divisions and

the complaining, and that beacon go out. He did that. He labored and he strived for that purpose. Let me ask you: what is your, what are you working so hard for? Is what you are working for gonna be something that you can present to Christ when he comes again? That you can see, "Lord, I served you. We made it. Here they are. Here's the people that I loved, that I gave your word to and they made it and they're faithful and they're complete in you." What are you working so hard for? What are you working so hard for?

You notice that Paul doesn't, he doesn't say here, he's like, "Yeah, you know what? God's sovereign so I ain't worried about it. You know, who will get saved will get saved and that'll be that and I didn't really have anything to do with it, I just showed up." Right? Is that his attitude? Why is that our attitude so much? I'll tell you why, it's because we're lazy and the sovereignty of God makes us feel better about being lazy. We fear man and the sovereignty of God comforts us in our failure to give the Gospel to people that need it. That's why. That's why we don't have that attitude. The sovereignty of God is a crutch for us rather than a motivating factor, that there are believers out there that he has chosen who will respond to the Gospel and I wanna go get them. I wanna go give the Gospel to them.

Okay, alright, so Jesus is coming again. I want to give you a couple of passages to look up because you can see examples of this way of life. The Apostle Paul in the book of Philippians there in verse 17, he says, "I am being poured out as a drink offering," chapter 2, verse 17,

17 ... 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.

You see, Paul saw himself as a sacrifice just like a drink offering. They used to mix wine or it was probably grape juice. Anyways, wine and then they would pour it out on the sacrifice to complete the sacrifice and that pictured Paul as he viewed his life, that his life was one that was being completely spent for the worship of God and the sacrifice of their faith completing their sacrifice. So their faith was a sacrifice that Paul was offering to God like a priest who is pouring his life completely out, every drop for the sake of that purpose, and that's how he saw himself. Acts 20, he says, "I do not count my life as any worth to myself, only that I may fulfill what God's called me to do." He spent himself. He says, "I would gladly spend and be spent for you."

So he was in prison rejoicing for these things. Chapter 3, verse 17, he says join in imitating me. Okay, I'm not gonna read that, just go ahead and write it down and look it up later. Philippians 2:19-22, you see the example of Timothy and how he lived. He says here that he was genuinely concerned for their welfare, for the other people seek their own interest not those of Christ. Timothy was genuinely concerned for the welfare of others. Epaphroditus, Philippians 2:25, risked his life for them. And then the example of Jesus, Philippians 2:1-10, who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but took on the form of a servant.

If you have that mindset, then you won't be grumbling or complaining. So in conclusion, do you find yourself complaining and disputing? Talking behind the scenes? Tearing others down? By the authority of Scripture and by the God who is at work in us, who has called us to be lights in the darkness, I command you to do all things without grumbling or disputing so that we together may be blameless children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. Hold fast to the word of life so that we may exult with triumph when Christ returns and let us be glad and rejoice together in this glorious endeavor.

Let me pray.

Lord, there's so much to be said but our ears are full. I pray, Father, that we would devote our lives completely to this calling to be a light in the darkness, and that as a result, Father, we would be filled with gladness and rejoicing and that we would put off grumbling and disputing for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.