

Spiritually Healthy Christians Work to Advance the Gospel.

The Example of the Christians in Philippi

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Well, a few weeks back, we began a series called God's Treatment Plan for Spiritual Renewal.

If you were to go to a doctor and just kind of present, Doc, here's the problem.

She's going to sit down and ask you a bunch of questions, and what she's doing is making an assessment.

She's going to try to discover what's going on, and then she's going to prescribe a treatment plan to help you get healthy again.

Or if you were to come to me for counseling, the process would go something like this.

I would say, well, what brings you in today?

And then you'd start telling me what's going on, and then I would listen and maybe take some notes and then ask some questions to better understand what was going on.

And then from there, we would probably meet a few times, and in between, I would prescribe, do some reading, some praying, and just perhaps a book that would be helpful for the spiritual or emotional problem that you were presenting.

And that is a treatment plan that I might give.

And I'm giving this idea to you because just as a good counselor or a physician prescribes a treatment plan, so too does God, the great physician, prescribe a treatment plan for our spiritual health, our spiritual renewal.

In fact, I would share with you this.

I've said the treatment plan many times, many different ways, gather for worship, grow in groups and in personal devotions, and go, find opportunities to serve God and others, both inside and outside of the church.

At times I've said gather, grow, go.

It could be like a map that says, okay, you are here and you could look at yourself and go, okay, I

gather for worship once in a while.

Okay, now you know where you're at.

Let's start growing from there.

Or if you say, I gather for worship consistently, but I don't really know any other Christians.

Okay, now we know the next step for you in your spiritual growth.

Would be to get together with other Christians and start enjoying each other's time and spend time in the Word.

And for others, it might be, hey, maybe start reading your Bible.

And then the third thing, and I don't know that there's a particular order, but I just kind of put them together this way.

Go, find opportunities to serve God, be a part of not only serving the body, but sharing the gospel across the street, across the city and around the world.

See, God's treatment plan for spiritual health and renewal prescribes partnering with Jesus and others for the advance of the gospel.

So what does that look like?

We're going to, this morning, we're going to look at the Book of Philippians, and we're going to sort of approach it a different way.

I think my preaching professors would reprimand me for this, but this one isn't being graded by them.

And so we're going to look at the Philippians as something like a case study.

If you were going to study counseling, one of the things you would do is you would read case studies.

And so a research would say, client came to me with this presenting problem, with these conditions, and then having listened to them, I prescribed this treatment, and here were the results.

So we're going to look at the Philippians, and what we're going to see is a case study of a church, a group of Christians who are growing in Christ, but not perfect.

But they are a group of Christians that are actively involved in advancing the Gospel.

Paul said in chapter 1 that he was praying for them to continue to grow spiritually, yet he also in the very same prayer, he is thanking God for their partnership in the Gospel.

He saw their willingness to pray and sacrifice so that others might hear the Gospel and believe in Jesus for salvation.

He saw this as a sign of their spiritual health.

It was proof that God was working in them, renewing them spiritually.

It was a part of their redemption.

So the Philippians are a case study of spiritual renewal.

And by looking at their example, we can see what choices we have to make in order to continue our growth in spiritual health.

We're going to begin with verses, chapter 1, verses 3 to 7.

And there we see that spiritually healthy Christians work to advance the Gospel.

Let's read.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine, for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now.

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.

Verse 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 of the Gospel.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank you for today and for this time to gather together in worship.

My heart's desire is that we would hear the heartbeat of our Savior, the voice of the Holy Spirit through the pages of scripture this morning.

Let us see the example of the Philippians and be inspired, be motivated.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Spiritually healthy Christians work to advance the Gospel.

And we see that with the Philippians.

And so Paul in this sort of prayer report, he's talking about how he thanks God for them because they have partnered with him and with Christ to advance the Gospel.

Partnered with Christ and Paul to advance the Gospel.

Jesus Christ came and he began to present the Gospel, to invite people to repent, to be saved.

And now Paul is continuing that mission.

And he sees the Philippians as partners of grace.

Over the years, one of the things that I have done is I've taken Philippians 1, 5, and I'll send out cards.

And I almost hesitate to say it because I could probably send twice as many cards with this verse reference as I do.

But when I see somebody locking arms with me and I see them doing something, investing themselves to advance the Gospel, to serve other Christians, and to serve outside of the church, I go, they're partners with me in the Gospel.

And so sometimes I'll send a thank you card with that Philippians 1, 5 reference.

But and I think that the legitimate application of it, but as we're going to see, Paul has something

else in mind when he thinks about their particular way of partnering.

But he sees that their work is evidence of God's work in them.

Their interest in sharing the Gospel, interest in promoting missions, interest in supporting his work is evidence that God began a good work in them.

When he studied, I studied this out, I began to look, I said, when he says a good work in you, is he talking about salvation?

Or is he talking about sanctification?

I actually don't think these are mutually exclusive, but first, the partnership of grace, they believe the Gospel and we're saved.

We're saved by grace through faith.

But then sanctification, that is a big word that we don't use outside of church very often.

It basically describes God's process of transforming us.

And so he sees, look, you believe the Gospel and from the beginning and you read about it in Acts 16, from the beginning, they were partnering with Paul to advance the Gospel across the street and around the world.

And he's excited about this.

And he looks at him and says, God's obviously at work with you.

And I'm confident that he's going to keep this work in you until Christ Jesus returns.

They had a big picture about what was the most important.

So Paul sees them as being saved from God's judgment and saved for God's glorious purposes.

They believed the gospel and now we're being transformed by the gospel.

Their partnership with Paul and with God to advance the gospel across the street around the world was proof of God's work.

And I would tell you that that's still true today.

It is one of those signs of spiritual vitality when a Christian is interested in seeing the gospel advancing and when we see people come to faith in Jesus Christ, that excites us.

When we see that dad gets saved and now he's becoming a Christ-like husband and a Christ-like father discipling his children, when we get excited about that, that is a sign of spiritual life.

I believe it was Adrian Rogers who once said that, this may not be an exact quote, but pretty strong words.

He said, if you're not interested in seeing people here that believe the gospel, you might need to check whether or not you're actually saved yourself.

Because the gospel changes our values.

Embracing the gospel changes what's important to us.

It changes our goals and ultimately our behavior.

Spiritually healthy Christians work to advance the gospel.

Now, I keep saying this phrase, advance the gospel, and I'm going to keep saying it over and over, and there's a reason why.

Paul is in prison now, and he has sent a man named, I'm sorry, the Philippians have sent a man named Epaphroditus to Paul to get word about his condition.

As far as they're concerned, if Paul is in prison, the gospel is shackled with him.

And he says, no, no, no.

I want you to know that the things that have happened to me have actually turned out for the advance of the gospel.

And so when we talk about this, he's saying, look, Philippians, your heartbeat is the same as mine.

That come what may, we want the gospel of Jesus Christ to go forward.

And so that's why I'm going to keep saying this phrase.

I'm stealing it from Philippians 1.

I believe it was 12 or 13.

But the Philippians had partnered with God by praying for the spread of the gospel.

Look at chapter 1, verse 19 to 25.

Spiritually healthy Christians pray for the advance of the gospel.

I'll read the tail end of verse 18 and then following.

Yes, and I will rejoice.

Why?

For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this imprisonment will turn out for my deliverance.

As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, come what may, whether by life or death.

21, For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

And if I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.

Yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell.

I am hard pressed between the two.

My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is better.

But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.

The Philippians wanted to know what was going on with Paul.

What's the likely outcome?

You're in prison?

Are they going to behead you?

A very real possibility.

And he says, look, I'd rather die and go be with Jesus.

That's better.

But I tell you what, I'm kind of disconnected from it because I'm all about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I'm not sure which I would choose.

I would rather go be with Jesus, but it's better for you that I stick around.

So I suspect that because that's true and because you are praying for me, I suspect I'm going to be set free.

See, the Philippians, they are praying for Paul's release because they know that if he's set free, he's going to go about doing what he always does, which is sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever he goes.

Spiritually healthy Christians pray that the gospel would advance so that others may hear it, believe it, and be saved.

Watch the gospel.

I'm going to tell you something.

As a pastor theologian, I'm a public theologian.

That's what I do.

We can complicate this sometimes.

The gospel is actually very simple.

Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for sins and rose again.

When someone believes that, they are saved and then they are put into a new course, a new plan.

God is now writing the course of their life.

God is giving them directions.

There's a new mission.

Before we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we're like Frank Sinatra.

We do it our way.

But when we come to faith in Jesus, he, Amen.

Now we're trying to do what he is interested in.

If he is interested in seeing people come to faith, it could be saved.

And when we are excited about that, we are embracing the mission that God gave the Father, God the Father gave to the Son.

Paul believed that he would be released in answer to their prayers.

Because spiritually healthy Christians pray for the advance of the Gospel.

What does that look like?

Well, I don't currently know of any, personally know of any minister, missionaries, pastors that are in prison.

But many of us, we're very interested in what's going on in Ukraine because we have a ministry that we support that does evangelistic work there.

And we get reports, of course, on the news about the warfare and the bloodshed and the death.

But then from our missionaries on the field, we hear these reports about people coming to faith in Jesus Christ because of the hardship.

Now here, so here, here's how I kind of how I pray, because I don't know what to do with this.

I pray for peace because death, this warfare, bloodshed, these are not good things.

These are bad things.

But in the meantime, one of the things I've come to know is that God can use bad things to get his to advance his agenda.

He's that good.

And so I pray for for the war to end.

But I also pray that in the meantime, God would would keep people alive and keep the gospel going forth.

And we are here.

He reports to this all the time that people are coming to faith in Jesus Christ in the midst of the battlefield.

And so that's what spiritually healthy Christians do is we pray for that.

See, working with God and others for the advance of the gospel requires us to be to pray for it.

And sometimes that prayer requires sort of a sacrifice, a shifting of focus.

I was talking about this with the students earlier this morning.

One of the things that we do in church a lot, and I think we should do and continue to do, is we pray a lot for people who are sick.

And we ought to be doing that.

But one of the signs of spiritual health and vitality, as I see in this case study of the Philippians, they pray for the advance of the Gospel across the street and around the world.

The beginning of the Philippian Church, I believe it was Acts 16, they come to faith in Jesus Christ, and then they are partnering with Paul immediately to get the Gospel out in their own city.

And then they send Paul out and they're supporting him.

And so we see that in prayer, that we see that they support him in prayer, and spiritually healthy Christians sacrifice so that the Gospel can advance.

Look at chapter 2, verse 25 to 30.

He says, oh, by the way, while you're turning there, Epaphroditus got sick along the way.

On his journey to find Paul and minister to him, he got sick.

And so here's what he writes in chapter 2, verse 25 to 30.

I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier.

Now, that's a resume.

I, the Apostle Paul, talk about, can you imagine that?

Brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier of the great Apostle Paul.

That's a resume.

And he is also 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.

Verse 27, 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, so 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.

Why?

Verse 30.

For he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

So what we see here is the Philippians are an example of spiritually healthy Christianity because they sacrificed to advance the Gospel.

How so?

First off, the Philippians sacrificed by sending a key leader to help others.

They sacrificed by sending a key leader to help others.

Last week, our good friend and brother, Pastor Rob, was back here with us.

I feel the loss of him now that he's serving elsewhere.

In fact, I would tell you this, but a few months, about a year or so ago, when he and I were talking, I said, why don't you put your name out there and start filling pulpits?

There's lots of empty pulpits in our community.

I had a friend call me and basically he's like, are you out of your mind?

You're going to lose that guy.

I'm like, I'm not dumb.

I kind of know.

But it was good for the kingdom of God that the pastor Rob got out to preach the gospel faithfully in other churches.

It's good that he's over at Wayntown.

Yeah, I miss him.

It's good that he's over there ministering to that church.

What we see, that was a sacrifice.

Now you get it.

The Philippians sacrificed by sending Epaphroditus to Paul.

So the people, they could have had an attitude that said, wait a sec, we're going to send Epaphroditus.

Don't we need him to lead some Bible studies?

Don't we need him to go to the hospital?

Don't we need him to run the sound system?

Sure, you need him to do all what?

Oh, they didn't have sound systems.

But you get the point.

They sacrificed by sending him off.

One of the things I was thinking about that this morning, I said, Calvary kind of has a history of doing this.

You know, with Pastor Kurt, yeah, he did visitation.

But we also said, Pastor Kurt, we want you to go to the prisons and share the gospel with inmates.

That was Calvary sending off somebody.

He wasn't here.

I mean, he did all kinds of things.

But Calvary had a vision for, hey, let's let's hire, let's bring a minister on staff, and we're going to send him to people who are incarcerated, who are maybe are not going to come to our church, but they are going to hear the gospel.

That's kind of the same mindset.

So the Philippians sacrificed by sending a key leader to help somebody else.

And then Epaphroditus, a member of the Philippian Church, he sacrificed by putting his life on the line for others.

He nearly died for the advancement of the gospel.

So when I suggest to you that this is a case study of spiritually healthy Christians, I'm not saying they're perfect.

I'm saying when it comes to the desire to see the gospel go forward, they are really good people to look at.

They have an example set for us to follow.

And so then we see there was something interesting there.

He describes Epaphroditus, he gives him this great resume builder.

And then he said, he is your minister and who's ministering to my needs.

He talks about them in these glowing terms.

What does he mean when he says this?

He's your messenger and minister to my needs.

Here's what he was saying.

He was looking at Epaphroditus this way.

He was sent to Paul as a gift.

And he was sent with a gift.

He was sent as a gift because he's going to minister to them, but he was sent with a gift because he's going to support him financially.

See what we see then from the Philippians is that spiritually healthy Christians give so that the Gospel can advance.

Look at Philippians 4, 10 through 20.

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

Let's pause.

He's absolutely talking about their giving to support his ministry.

And he says, he describes it as being revived.

They had started out strong, but for some reason, whatever the reason was, they had stopped giving.

Right?

But now it's been revived.

Verse 11, not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.

And 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.

Yet it was kind of you to share in my trouble.

And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again.

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

I have received full payment and more.

I am well supplied.

I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts that you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

And here's a verse that you often pulled out of context.

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen.

The Philippians were Paul's ministry partners.

Now, if you ever got a card from me or an email, or I just said thank you for your partnership in the Gospel, I was thinking about the fact that you were serving alongside of me.

We had the same mission and that motivated me.

But Paul, when he wrote that, probably primarily had in mind their financial support.

So their partnership was interesting.

Their part was to give financial support for his ministry, and his part was to receive that support.

In the beginning of the book, he says that you are partakers of grace with me.

What he had in mind included the idea that the grace of Christ included the fact that they got to be a part of advancing the gospel by giving to its work.

Now, for some reason, they had stopped giving, but now they had resumed it.

He said, you've lacked opportunity.

I thought that through and I said, why did they lack opportunity?

Well, I don't know that the text gives this.

I'm just going to use my imagination.

Number one, it could be the economy turned sideways.

Inflation went bad and they didn't have the finances.

That's one option.

Their personal economies were bad.

Number two, it could be that they, because of persecution, they had lost work.

That was one of the things that was often done to Christians in the early days of the church and still happens around the world.

Sometimes, precretions are persecuted by being pushed out of the workforce.

That's a possibility.

Number three, maybe they didn't know how to get to Paul.

They didn't know where he was.

They lost track of him.

Maybe they had heard he'd been arrested, but didn't know how to find him.

Whatever the case was, they had lost, he says you lost the opportunity.

But now you've revived your giving for me again.

Any one of those are options.

A fourth one might be that he's being very kind.

And maybe they had lost interest for a while, but now have become interested again.

Whatever the case was, they're giving again and Paul's praising God for this.

They had resumed.

When we give to support the Gospel, advancing ministries that are all over the place, God counts it as fruit of righteousness.

It is a sign of our spiritual health.

Could I tell you something?

When I was thinking this morning about this message, I have this memory of one of the conversation I had years ago.

I used to work with this.

Her name was Sam Samantha.

And we went out to lunch.

No, it was not a date.

Simply put, she wasn't interested in guys.

And all the people in the office stood up and they thought it was about to be a big ugly fight because the fundamental Bible guy is about to go out to a work lunch with a coworker who was living differently than the Bible calls for.

Now we had this interesting conversation and she said, you know, the first time my wife and I went to a church and they talked about giving.

And that really bothered her.

And that was sort of in the back of my mind, I say, so oftentimes when I think about preaching on giving, I think this could be somebody's first time ever at Calvary Baptist Church.

And that's what they hear.

And they're going to say, preachers are always talking about giving, but I'm going to defend myself.

I've been here four and a half years, so that's about 500, 400 plus sermons.

I don't know how many Bible studies.

I probably talked about giving five times.

But even beyond that, I want you to catch this.

I had to, I have to, I have to embrace Paul's mindset.

Because what he is saying is when we give, God counts it as the fruit of righteousness.

And it is an act that we do that is agreeable and pleasing to God.

And so, so long as I can preach that from the right mindset, you'll hear from hear about it from time to time.

But here was one of those things that we look at.

One of the signs of our spiritual vitality is whether or not we are interested in missions and in supporting it both in prayer and sacrifice and in giving.

God invites us to partner with him and others to advance the gospel.

The Philippians were doing this.

They are a case study and how that's supposed to look.

And while they were not perfect Christians, this is one area where they were very strong.

And so we can learn from them.

So then what do we do with this?

What are some action steps?

Number one, decide to partner with God and others to advance the gospel.

You and I have a choice to make.

We can choose not to or we can choose to participate with God.

And some people might ask, I assume the question, what do I get out of this?

The satisfaction of knowing you have partnered with the king of the universe, Jesus himself, to reach lost souls.

The satisfaction of seeing, hey, this family came to faith in Jesus Christ and it radically transformed them.

And now their kids know Jesus.

Because I can tell you, my family, we've not always been Christians.

My parents kind of knew Jesus, but when they got saved, it changed the trajectory of their lives, my lives, and my kids and my nieces and nephews.

And who knows how the story is going to continue.

See, we have that unbelievable joy of being a part of that.

So decide to be a part of this.

Partner with God and others to advance the Gospel.

Many of you already do, so thank you for that.

Partner by praying for us.

When we're praying for those who in our church who are sick, can I tell you to do something?

Consider the souls of those who are sick and dying without Christ.

Pray that we would advance the Gospel across the street, across the city, and around the world.

And then sacrifice.

For some, that is a call to give of your time and efforts.

For others, financially support the ministries of the church.

I want to say something.

Paul knew what they were giving.

Can I tell you something?

I'm aware of our financial statements all the time.

I pay attention.

I have no clue who gives what.

I don't look.

And some pastors have a different take on that.

And so one of the things that I don't ever get to do is to say thank you, not in any personal way.

But Paul is saying thank you.

So I'll just simply say, if you've ever given to support the ministries of this church, or any ministry that we partner with, thank you.

But not because I'm enriched by it.

I don't fly out of here in a jet or anything like that.

If you're getting mad at me for talking about giving, can I just say something?

If I was on television today, preaching on giving, going to fly out of here in a personal jet, there's a good chance you'll keep listening to what I'm saying.

And you know what I'm talking about.

Because you will wait for me to say, if you give, you're going to get rich.

And somebody might even point to Philippians 4.19 and abuse that out of sorts.

And all I'm going to be able to give you is to thank you and say God's counting it on your ledger.

He is accounting it to you is righteousness.

And you get to be a part of seeing lost souls come to faith in Jesus Christ.

That's your reward.

But thank you.

I guess I would feel this kind of personally.

I feel boxed in a corner when it comes to preaching about this.

But when we look at the Philippians and we think about Scott's spiritual treatment plan, there is no doubt about it.

Spiritual life and vitality run through three things, gather for worship, grow in personal studies and groups, and go, work to advance the gospel.

And part of that includes praying, giving, going.

And so my encouragement to you is to assess yourself and say, where am I at on this treatment plan?

Is gathering for worship important to me?

That tells you where you're at.

Am I interested in reading God's Word so that I can be personally transformed?

Am I interested in getting together with other Christians so I can know them?

Can I tell you what my own personal journey went was backwards?

It was something like gather for worship, then go on mission trips, then read my Bible and oh yeah, maybe I should get to know other Christians.

That's kind of backwards as far as I'm thinking of it.

But in the process of God's goodness and transformation, starts putting all of those things into place.

But when you put it down, you have to make a choice.

Am I going to be in on God's spiritual treatment plan?

If you do, I can't promise you your bank account is going to get bigger, but I can't promise you that God will change you for his glory, your good, and the good of others.

Finally, as our praise team comes for our final song of worship, I would simply say, number one, if you've never come to put your trust in Jesus Christ, the gospel is really simple.

Jesus Christ died on the cross to pave for sins and rose again the third day for your sins.

And so my invitation to you is to repent of unbelief, put your trust in him and determine to follow him.

But perhaps really this sermon was more.

It's for the believers today for sure.

My invitation to you is to partner with Jesus and with other Christians to advance the gospel across the street and around the world.

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