

How to be a star

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[0 : 00] Do you guys do New Year's resolutions? A loaded question, isn't it? Kind of think to ourselves, on the start of a new year,! This year, I'm going to really crush it.

I'm going to really go for it. I'm going to be different. I'm going to sing an inspirational Disney song. And I'm going to really shine. My New Year's resolution a few years back was that I'm not going to do New Year's resolutions anymore.

That's the only one I've kept. Ever. Lots of us went back to work and back to school this week, didn't we? So even if you didn't do New Year's resolutions, there are still the same old expectations to match up to.

School, you know, are you on course for your predicted grades? Same for uni, really. Is the new stuff that you got for Christmas as good as your friends' stuff? Will you live the corporate values this year?

That gift that's got constantly shoved into a corner because of the business of your life. Are you finally going to develop that this year and really shine? Are you going to be a star this year?

[1 : 12] Just for a bit of fun, I went to chat GPT, which is one of the AI bots, and I asked, how can I become a star? Right, and it's fun.

This is what it said. Hang on. That one. That's the one. So you've got to hone your craft. I never know how to say that word. Hone your craft. Take acting, singing, or dancing lessons. I'm not taking dancing lessons.

Consistent practice is key to improving your skills. Well, yes, that's probably true, isn't it? Build a portfolio. Create a showreel or demo. Show you mine later. Something that showcases your talent. Network and build connections. Consider hiring an agent to help you land gigs and provide industry guidance. I'm not hiring an agent. Most people can't afford to hire agents.

I don't know where this is coming from. Leverage social media to build a following. Social media platforms like Twitter, just a note here, chat GPT still thinks it's called Twitter. Don't know what that says about the rest of the information quality.

[2 : 14] Anyway, it can help you create a fan base. Work with other creators or influencers to gain exposure. So if any of you other creators or influencers want to work with me and gain some exposure, I'm available.

Look, even if this is a recipe for success, what if the truth is that you're just not that talented in that field?

What if actually you are talented but life knocks you back? There's nothing you can do about it. Something happens and it just doesn't work. What if you don't have the money for the dance classes and the agent?

Very few people get to be stars in that sense, don't we? But we all want to be all that we can be, don't we? So what we want is a way for everyone to be able to shine in life, right?

That's what we want. So what does it mean? What does it mean to live a life that burns bright, that brings light in the darkness? What does it mean to live a life that is beautiful and breathtaking?

[3 : 23] Well, that's really what Paul is talking about in this passage. But we need to do a little bit of a reminder. So you'll know that we haven't been in Philipians for a little while because of something called Christmas. So we're going to do a tiny recap here.

What we've been thinking about in the book of Philipians is having joy in Jesus. We've been thinking about how Jesus creates a community of joy around him when people believe the good news.

And Paul's told us that we can share in that forgiveness and in that new life that God offers out of his grace. Chapter 1, verse 7. In fact, he's writing the whole book for your joy and growth in the

faith, he says.

Verse 125. And he's just encouraged us, as we heard Annika and Asha read, to think like Jesus, have the mind of Christ. Chapter 2, verse 5. And in that chapter, he's been teaching us how Jesus left glory, became human, humbly obeying the Father, even though it meant dying on the cross for our sins.

And the scripture tells us that Jesus did that for the joy set before him. And so the Father has made Jesus Lord and judge of all.

[4 : 36] Verse 11. Every tongue will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. Now that is good news. But now what? What do we do with it?

Well, in our passage, Jesus, through Paul, tells us how to respond and what that looks like. And he tells us, if we will do these things, if we will be like this, then we will shine like stars in a dark world, burning with an inner light that nobody can put out.

How do we do that? Well, first, verses 12 to 13. Keep growing brighter as Jesus shines in you.

Let's look at verse 12. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

See how he links it back to what he's just been teaching about Jesus with that word, therefore? So all of those things about Jesus that Paul has been saying means that the right response to how amazing he is and the joy we have in him is to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

[5 : 49] We need to commit to growing, knowing that we as Christians live in the presence of God. And we hate to disappoint him, don't we?

Because he loves us so much. That's that fear and trembling bit. We don't want to disappoint him because we love him. We need to commit to growing. And the word that he uses to describe that is obedience.

It means doing what God says. Because Jesus isn't only our saviour, he's also our Lord. That's what we just read in verse 11, isn't it?

And Jesus being Lord must make a difference in our lives, according to Paul. I don't know if you've seen this t-shirt. But Jesus is coming.

Look busy. Well, this is not like that, friends. Because, of course, Paul has just said it's not just when Paul is present that the Philippians are listening, growing, obeying, shining.

[6 : 48] It's much more when he's absent. And that's really relevant because he has just said that Jesus is no longer physically present with us. He is in heaven, reigning there.

And the kind of life that Jesus is looking for, the obedience that he wants from us, is not the kind that tries to be a good boy when someone's looking.

Or a good girl when someone's there in the room. No. In fact, he goes on to say something amazing. Let's look at verse 13. This kind of obedience is Jesus working in us.

And the verb for work in the Greek is *energeo*. And guess what word comes from that? *Energize*? That's right. *Energize*.

Paul is saying Jesus literally energizes us. He is effecting change in us and through us. So a life lived in obedience to Jesus, it turns out, is not just us doing a list of stuff.

[7 : 57] It is us together with the Lord Jesus in partnership. He doesn't ask us to do good stuff to earn our salvation, does he? And he doesn't ask us to do good stuff to stay saved either.

He says, you are safe. You are saved, full stop. Now let's work that out together. And then he changes our will and our desires and guides our actions.

See, we don't save ourselves by being good. And we don't grow into our salvation by trying to be good either. And that's where our Catholic friends have got it wrong. See, keeping in with God by being good ultimately ends in hopelessness.

Instead, we grow brighter as Jesus shines in us more and more. So we need to grow brighter, don't we? But it's not let go and let God.

It's more like this. Learning to drive. So when the instructor turns up for your lesson, he already has a car, doesn't he?

[9 : 07] He's already filled it with fuel. And he's made sure it's road legal. It's what the Lord does for us. And then we get behind the steering wheel, don't we? And we do some stuff. The instructor's still got the pedals.

And he gives the instructions. But you're driving just as much as he is. And that's what it's like when Jesus works out his salvation in us. It's a partnership. I don't know if you're into your theology, but there's a point here which is really important, I think.

God is in charge of everything, isn't he? And at the same time, we are responsible. Isn't that a contradiction? If God is in charge of everything and we're responsible for our actions, how does that go together?

It can't both be true, can they? Well, actually, yes, they are, according to Paul. And in fact, it's really important that they are. Because Paul says the practical upshot of God working his will in our lives in partnership with us, he's in charge, we're responsible, is that we shine, as we'll come on to see. So I'd love you to take a moment just to think about this question. In what part of my life do I need to lean into the light of Jesus more this year?

[10:27] Just take 30 seconds to think about that. So we need to keep growing brighter as Jesus shines in us.

Secondly, we need to remember what stars look like. And there's five things here which we will go through. Rapid fire, verse 14. Do everything without grumbling or arguing.

Especially in God's family. Do you remember when we were in Numbers? Israel grumbled, didn't they? Didn't turn out well. Well, the commentator says grumbling is this, really.

Selfish complaining. Unbalanced criticism of small matters. Impatience towards something or someone we haven't taken the time to understand. Grudging unwillingness to be helpful.

That's it. And that same commentator asked a really good question which is this. How on earth can anyone argue and grumble when they're standing next to the cross? No grumbling.

[11:52] Secondly, stand out, verse 15. So that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky. We should behave in a way that makes us stand out from those around us. That sheds light into their lives.

The way that we are as a church family together shouldn't be the way that people are outside. We need to stand out. Thirdly, we need to hold on to the truth, verse 15.

You will shine among them like stars in the sky, verse 16, as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour in vain.

So did you get that? You will only shine as you hold on to the word of life. Because that's how God feeds the fire. So we need to cherish God's message this year.

[12:57] What if we adorned and personalised our Bibles like we did our phones? Most of us have a phone case, don't we? Got our favourite wallpaper. Maybe do it with your car. Maybe do it with your bedroom.

Let's do that with God's word. Because we love it. Because it's so often close to us in our hands. When you go today at the doors, there'll be a little star charm in a bowl.

Why don't you take one of those, thread a bit of twine through it, stick it into your Bible and make it as a marker. That can be the beginning of adorning God's word and a reminder to you that you are a star and that with God's help you can shine.

So we need to hold on to the truth. And we need to give of ourselves, verse 17. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

So here is Paul being poured out, giving of himself. And here are the Philippians giving sacrificially of themselves in service. It's reminded me of some lyrics of a song that I used to like when I was a teenager.

[14:11] I expect probably none of you know it, but if you do, come and chat to me afterwards.

Here it is. Let's take a walk into the sky, conversing with the stars to fathom why they're not afraid to burn, to lose themselves while turning into light.

We know what a star is, don't we? It's a big burning ball of gas. It's literally being used up, even as it gives out light. It's being poured out, if you like, as a drink offering.

It's sacrificially serving. And following Jesus is like that, friends. It is losing yourself while turning into light. Can you imagine what the world would be like if, instead of walking around figuring out how to live long and prosper, and being dead afraid of being dead all the time, we were like this.

Not afraid to burn while turning into light. That is upside down and back to front crazy, isn't it? But that is what it means to follow Jesus.

We burn out brighter because we know that our light will last forever in Jesus. And that's how to be a star. And finally, that means we get to be glad together.

[15:33] Verse 18. I am glad and rejoice with all of you. Verse 18. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. Paul rejoices in them. And the Philippians rejoice with Paul.

Paul rejoices in them. Because if we do these things, church, then we will have lots to rejoice about. Like we did on Friday night. It was great, wasn't it? Seeing each other shining helps us keep our joy as a family.

so again I just want to give you a moment take a look at this list, these five things which of these would you like to grow in so that you'll burn out with a brighter light with that light that will last for eternity just take 30 seconds to think about that so we need to keep growing brighter as Jesus shines in us we need to remember what stars look like but finally we need to copy those who copy Jesus a lot of pressure today isn't there to be an original don't be like anyone else because that must mean that somehow you're not being like yourself you're not being true to yourself that doesn't follow logically of course because everyone is like other people in lots of ways aren't we?

even if we don't really want to admit it of course we are unique, the Bible tells us that we are all uniquely made in God's image but the Bible and scientists actually will tell you that we are by nature imitators we learn by mimicking we are always patterning our lives on other people that's just how we are as human beings when you're a kid you copy your parents, right?

when you're a teenager you so don't copy your parents but how do you not copy your parents when you're a teenager? yes you guessed it, by copying other people instead that's why we have peer pressure that's why celebrity influencers have so much sway because people want to copy them here's some words from Salvador Dali who's arguably one of the most original artists of all time those who do not want to imitate anything produce nothing it's quite stark isn't it?

[18:20] we are all imitators so much, much more important than asking the question am I being true to myself? if you want to shine is to ask the question who am I being like?

who am I imitating? and is it the right person? so that instead of producing nothing I produce joy and goodness and obedience so that I shine and in this last section Paul sets before his readers two people in the local church to copy Timothy Timothy who thinks of others and of Jesus first and not of himself and Epaphroditus who is willing to die for Christ do you remember in Paul's thinking death is not so terrible remember what he says?

for me to live is Christ to die is gain and Paul says copy these guys copy these guys so here's the obvious question to ask yourself for a moment who am I being like?

who am I imitating right now? and then the follow up I think is this who at Bethel can I watch and learn from as they follow Jesus?

that's what Paul is saying he's holding up Timothy and Epaphroditus he's saying look at these guys they've got the right idea you want to be like them but we can go deeper here actually because if you look closely what Paul praises in these two men are the qualities that he describes Jesus as having in verses 6 to 8 just look back there for a moment Christ Jesus who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage in other words he's not looking out for his own interests rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness looks out for the interests of others and being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross he's willing to die so these two men are copying Jesus in other words Paul is saying copy these guys because they copy Christ that makes sense because Jesus is the only true original guys he is the blueprint he is God and only God can originate if you go back to Genesis 1 that's what we see isn't it there's only one person who can make something out of nothing and that's God so copy Christ here's what Revelation 22 says about Christ

[21:23] I am the root and offspring of David and the bright morning star so Jesus is the dawn bringer he's the north star the pole star the light by whom we plot our course that's Jesus so if I want to be a star I go to the original source of light and I plug in and if I want my life to be on course then I plot my course by him by the light of the morning star see our shining then mimics the radiance of Jesus which as we read in Hebrews is the radiance of the father's glory our obedient life verse 12 flows out of his obedience verse 8 and that's the bottom line of how to be a star if I want to shine I forget what everybody else says that I need to do and ought to be and I ask

Jesus instead to conquer the darkness in my heart and start shining in me and then with his help I work at keeping the light on with his help I work at seeing that light grow so I can be a star shining in

the darkness and if we work at our salvation with fear and trembling which is what Paul is asking us to do friends if we live in partnership with the morning star then we will shine isn't that good news let's pray Lord God we thank you for Jesus we thank you that he shines brighter than anything else in this world we thank you for Paul's wonderful description of him loving humble not proud willing to die a shameful death on a cross for our sake now the Lord of all Lord help us to copy him to copy those who copy him
Lord work in us so that we will shine in Jesus name Amen Thank you.