

"Worship that Leads to Life" Philippians 3:15-4:4

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Date: 15 June 2025

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. We'll open up God's word together. And then we'll dive right in. Will you pray with me? Father in heaven, we thank you for this wonderful, beautiful, essential truth That you are one God, yet you are three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Lord, we thank you for who you are and for what you have done. Lord, we thank you that the call for us is not to ascend, to heaven, but your Son descended and then lived and died and rose again and then ascended.

And that's the promise for us. Father in heaven, will you please make that real in our hearts? Help us to embrace the truth. Help us to look to you for real reality.

Everything that runs contra to this is not reality. For you are the creator and you set the boundaries of what is real. So Lord, help us to live in this real world that you have created.

Bless this time in your word. And we ask this in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. If you are following along with one of these Philippians scripture journals, awesome.

[1 : 17] Good job. You can pick up one if you don't have one at the welcome table. We will be on page 16 this morning. I've been on a bit of an introduction here.

I've been on a bit of an espionage tip. I don't know. I want to watch spy shows. I want to listen to spy stories and podcasts and read spy novels, even though I get confused at all the details.

But I started recently listening to the story of the man who betrayed Osama bin Laden. He was an Al-Qaeda operative in the late 90s and the mid-2000s.

It's a great podcast. And there's a whole series of them. There's like 16 seasons. I'm loving life right now. And I'm on the edge of my seat, even though not actually on the edge of my seat, oftentimes on the edge of doing dishes or something.

But I'm listening to the free version, which means there's ads. And in the middle of like a very high intense moment in the podcast, it cuts to an advertisement about some random podcast that's boring or not as exciting.

[2 : 30] But it's like it pulls the e-brake, so to speak, with all my excitement. And one of those advertisements was for a podcast called How Do You Cope?

That was a really interesting podcast. How Do You Cope? It's a British podcast, so I've never at all heard of the... It's a comedian and journalist who hosts it.

And he has, I don't know, I don't want to say like B-level celebrities because maybe they're A-level. I'm not sure. But I would say B-level. I haven't heard of them. It's not like they're in big box office hits. But you have different celebrities or different kind of thought leaders on to talk about ways to cope.

And what strikes me about this, and it's on like in between every show, this advertisement, is how fragile men and women are. And by the way, I don't say that as like a judge person.

I'm finding myself more and more fragile in my day-to-day. I, as an example, I'll let my thoughts wander and they just go to a dark place, usually around my children.

[3 : 36] And I realize just the thought, just the thinking of certain things. And I can be set off for a half an hour or 45 minutes of just really terrible distraction. But all that to say, you know, here we are, very put-together people in the West.

Again, general, I'm speaking generally. We're put together. We have opportunities abounding. We have wealth at our disposal, opportunities at our disposal.

We have kind of life, you know, on a silver platter. And yet, we're still extremely fragile. Maybe, potentially, more fragile than we've ever been. We struggle and suffer with change and with pain. Unmet expectations. Fears. In my case, irrational ones. Sometimes they're very rational. Hiccups in our schedule.

Okay? A canceled meeting or a deadline that's been moved up. Whatever it may be, we are easily knocked off course and are surprisingly quick to abandon our principles, our philosophies, our beliefs that we claim to hold on to, that we think are, or at least we, you know, put forward that it's our guiding North Star.

[4 : 55] We're quick to abandon such things. We compromise our convictions. We find them to be weakly held. Or we deny their effectiveness. It's a really interesting time to be somebody in the West.

And yet, is not our desire to be more whole, more grounded, more stable, more reasonable, more solid? Is this not the point even of this podcast?

How to cope? We want stability. We want to be strong. We don't want to be fragile. We want to be anti-fragile. You might be familiar with that concept.

It's somewhat popular. It's gone around a lot of kind of self-help or psychology, pop psychology. I'm not saying it's, that means it's bad, but this idea of humanity has this desire to not be fragile, but to be anti-fragile.

And yet, you know, it's hard to think about being a holistic, stable person when, if we're honest, not all the time, but more than we'd like to admit, our default setting is survival.

[6 : 09] But I want to suggest to you, this will be the main thrust of today's message. I want to suggest to you that our problem isn't that we know there's a few issues that just need a bit of tweaking or need a little bit of fixing, that we just need to, you know, go through just a bit of training to gain a bit more resilience.

Maybe we just need some productivity app to help us with our out-of-control schedule. All those things are fine. All those things are very helpful. I would say to you, though, that the real problem that we have is an issue around worship.

Our strategy is to be more whole. They don't necessarily consider who to worship and how to worship. I mean, I would be awfully surprised.

Maybe, maybe, you know, I'd be proved wrong, but I'd be awfully surprised if there was a, you know, a whole series on how to cope on the importance of worship in one's daily life as a means of stability.

And yet, our problem is primarily one of worshiping the wrong things. We worship, but the wrong things. So our text today, Philippians 3, starting in verse 15 that Katie read, our text today offers a remarkably wise blueprint on how to be spiritually mature, or to put another way, to be anti-fragile in the best sense of the term.

[7 : 42] This spiritual maturity is a godly maturity that addresses our deepest needs and longings. It's exactly what we need. So we'll break up the text asking the question, how does this text teach us to be spiritually mature or anti-fragile?

The text will help us to know, in light of that, what to embrace, who to imitate, and then how to stand. What to embrace, who to imitate, and how to stand.

Point number one, what to embrace. Look with me at verses 15 and 16. Again, page 16 if you're following along on the scripture journal. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Verse 15 is, it's a bit of a hinge verse. Paul is alluding to the previous section, chapter 3, 1 to 14.

And especially, and he'll touch on it shortly, like in the next verse, but especially verses 12 to 14. In this section, Paul speaks of the mature believer as the one who thinks this way.

[9 : 06] And the thinking this way is a reference to this articulation that the Christian life is one of joy and privilege of knowing Christ. It is not about climbing our way to heaven.

It's not about building our kingdom on earth. Even the resurrection of the dead serves the purpose of knowing Christ. The privilege and the joy of knowing him and being known by him.

It is a gift from God, and therefore it can't be attained. It can't be gained through this piety or this status. You remember in last week, and if you weren't here, no problem, Paul, he talked about these false teachers who were leading the church astray, and they were really promoting, it was like this mutation of the law to make the law become the means by which we could then know Christ, which would then be the means that we could know God.

Where Paul was saying, listen, if that was the case, I'd be front of the line, but it has nothing to do with that. It's about the grace that God gives us in Christ Jesus. It's actually a gift from him.

And Paul is saying to the Philippians here, think this way. This is what maturity looks like. Christ Jesus himself has given us himself.

[10:26] He claims us, and he calls us. He claims us as his own. He invites us into his presence. So in sum, what it means to be mature, what Paul is saying here in verse 15, to think this way, is a call to embrace Christ as the ultimate prize in life, as the ultimate goal, as the ultimate thing to cherish.

It is Christ Jesus himself. And that, we looked at this last week, but as a bit of a reminder, that will then properly order the rest of our affections and our loves.

That we will put the right emphasis on the right things, and not elevate things to the place of God or devalue God, not that we can, but just in our day-to-day, in our worship.

So spiritual maturity, Paul is saying, involves recognizing at the very core of all of this that this is a gift from God, which means you are helpless to achieve it.

Mature thinking is really a sign that you recognize that you're actually not all that put together.

[11:38] That you are in need of a Savior, and that Christ Jesus is him. It is nothing short of having a proper understanding of the faith. And I'll just say this.

This is one of the reasons why, in our church, we are affirming the faith in either the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed, or in the Athanasius Creed, because proper theology, it matters. It's really important. And having proper theology isn't, it doesn't matter, so that we can elevate ourselves and say we are the church that has excellent Orthodox theology, you know, not like them, or not like those outside, but rather that we can know who God is because we are in desperate need of him.

And if we need him, we need him. Not some picture of him, not some kind of, again, mutation of who he is, or this false idea of who God, but him. So it's important then that we understand who God is.

So that, just a plug for the Athanasius Creed on a random Sunday in June. It's a wonderful thing. I'll just say this before we transition to the next bit.

[12:56] This is so much different than just having positive thinking. I'd say, listen, have positive thinking. Think positively. It's a good thing. I don't know, have positive thoughts.

It's much different than this idea of manifesting your success or praying to the universe or hoping to the universe that you will have some kind of favorable outcome.

Listen, those are belief structures. They're not just nice things. Those are forms of worship. Okay? They are belief structures. The starting point of all of those, I mean, they might make you feel really good, but the starting point of all of those has to do with what we deserve, our success, our happiness, our victory, our wholeness.

However, all of those things, the huge problem with them when they become the guiding philosophies and religious practices of our lives is that they are devoid of this understanding of our need, that we are broken before God, that we have this propensity to elevate ourselves to the throne of grace, and kind of kick God off.

Again, you can't do this, but just in our mentality, that's what we do. And this is a very offensive thing to God. It is the worship of self. Again, we have this worship problem that is happening.

[14:22] Paul says this is not the way to mature thinking. Mature thinking is understanding that you are in need. Remember Paul, he says, listen, I have all the reasons to boast, but I'm not boasting in any of that.

If you look back in verse 7 and 8, he says, whatever gain I had, I consider it, and we talked about this last week, rubbish. It's a very kind of cleaned up word to talk about excrement.

It's nothing. It has no value at all. The real gain is the surpassing knowledge of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. This is what true maturity is.

This is what it looks like. And any philosophy, any kind of belief structure or religion that really promotes otherwise, it is one that is antithetical to the gospel.

What's also important to see in these verses, and in fact, it's something that we have seen, and you'll notice this if you read through Philippians, we've seen throughout the letter, is this mindset is to be embraced collectively.

[15:30] There's a huge call and call for unity and togetherness and community sprinkled all through this letter. It's a huge deal for the Apostle Paul.

He puts a heavy emphasis on unity. Unity of mission, unity of worship, and in this case, he's saying, listen, have the same mindset. Think the same way.

Embrace this same reality. This call for a unified posture of commitment to living under this lordship of Jesus Christ, which is, I think, I'll put this forward to you, that the mature thing is not to draw away from God's people.

There is no faithful living outside of worship, worshiping with God's people, of being kind of your own thing on a Sunday or on a Tuesday or on a Thursday, just you and your Bible kind of divorced from the church.

It's a really important thing that you come to church and it's a wonderful thing that you're here. My spirituality is contingent on you guys, which is an incredible thing to think about.

[16:44] Your spirituality is in part contingent on other people. We are to embrace this together. And of course, it's not as though we take the place of God, but God has designed worship in his body to be this unified, beautiful thing where we spur each other on and we help each other identify when this mindset is not there, when immaturity is the thing that marks us and not godly spiritual maturity.

We embrace the gospel together, looking to Christ as our example to imitate. But what happens when, you know, people aren't where you're at?

Maybe you're a bit more mature than others or maybe spiritually, you're less mature than somebody else. Notice again, verse 16, the Apostle Paul says this, actually the second part of verse 15.

And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained. You know, there is also this recognition that we grow at different speeds in the faith.

We have different intellects, different spiritual sensitivities. And sometimes you will need to be buoyed, so to speak, by your brothers and sisters in the Lord.

[18:05] Sometimes that will be your job. Sometimes you just won't understand it. We've read about the Trinity and the Athanasian Creed and it's like, maybe you picked up on 5% of it and you're like, what?

Like there's this whole bit at the beginning saying if I don't believe this or embrace it, I can't be saved. I would say, listen, like hellfire is not licking at your feet right this second, okay?

The point is, there is this grace built into the church whereby as we grow, we grow together, but we grow at different speeds. And that is okay.

But keep your eye out for others and don't be so proud as to not ask for help and direction in prayers. The second point, who to imitate. Let us read verse 17 and we'll pause there.

Brothers and sisters, whenever you see this, especially in Philippians, there is such an affection that is oozing from the page. We don't necessarily see it here, but there is affection oozing from the page and we'll really pick that up when we read verse 1 of chapter 4, but I'll start in verse 17 here.

[19:12] Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. So much of good mentorship involves imitation.

It is a key way we learn from infancy to adolescence, into teenage years, into adulthood, our professional lives as well. We observe those we wish to be like and we imitate.

We see them as an inspiration. Yet, I would say, maybe you're like me, but I would say, if somebody says to me, hey listen, imitate me, I would say, not imitating you.

I don't like that kind of self-promotion. So what is happening with Paul? Is Paul cocky here? Is he self-promoting himself? Again, in the previous section, it's very clear that the false teachers are the ones that are promoting themselves, but here, it would seem that Paul is doing the same.

What is happening? Although Paul's words seem awfully cocky, especially as we, again, have a bit of a phobia towards this kind of talk in our society, Paul here, he is not prideful.

[20:33] He has already established that the only thing that truly matters in this life is this humble faith and bending a knee to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

So therefore, he calls the Philippians to the same goal. In another letter, in 1 Corinthians, Paul will say, follow me as I follow Christ. Paul really, truly here is saying, listen, follow me because here I am in chains.

I have walked this walk authentically, not in my own strength, but in Christ's strength that he has given me by his Holy Spirit. Follow me, imitate me.

And I think this is incredibly wise. Two reasons. Number one, you're going to imitate somebody. You're just bound to. You're not this kind of by yourself, silo, automaton, you know, you just have a code in your brain that's kind of setting your life.

No, you take in, you have these things called eyes and ears, these senses that help you process life and you're going to, you're bound to imitate something or someone.

[21 : 42] Paul is saying, listen, imitate me. And the second reason is huge because Paul will go on to talk about those that are trying and actively trying to, again, divert people away from Christ.

He says, listen, you're going to follow somebody. These people are promoting something that is awfully appetizing. It looks good on the outside, but believe me, and he'll mention this in the next couple verses we'll read in a moment, their end is not towards life but towards death.

So follow me. And the great irony in this is that Paul is in jail in chains, unjustly held for almost three years at this point and he is really saying this is the way to life.

Let's pause quickly. We'll go to verse 18 and 19 and read what Paul says. For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Sorry, we'll back up and I missed verse 17. We'll start in verse 17 and we'll read 18 again and also 19. Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

[22 : 59] Verse 18, For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end, that is their telos, their destination, their end is destruction.

Their God is their belly. And they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things. This is not merely a call to prioritize virtues over vices, though that is certainly a part of it.

Rather, it is a call to emulate and to imitate those who strive to follow Christ. Their example is a genuine fear of God and there's also a genuine fear that the church may be led astray.

Paul here, he is addressing this group of false teachers. He's already mentioned them a few times before. He doesn't specify exactly who they are or specify exactly what they do, but it's very clear their intent is to distort the gospel.

The core of what they're trying to do is deny the exclusivity of Christ as the means of salvation and if they're the same people as in the previous section, they are promoting again, this type of mutation of the law, a mutation of the gospel that kind of either cuts Christ out or says it's Christ plus something else.

[24 : 33] And Paul is saying these people, their end, their destination, the fruit of their labor will not lead to life, but actually it will lead to death.

And here they are unmasked and exposed for what they truly are. He mentions four things. He says their end is destruction, their God, their belly, and the belly would be, maybe a better way to say it would be their appetites, their desires.

They glory in shame, their eyes are on earthly things. These people are beholden to desires and they lack a self-control.

What they see is what they get. They want it, they get it. They're driven by wrong motives, they emphasize the wrong things. There's a gluttony about them and surely this is a gluttony of food, but it's even greater idea that goes beyond physical consumption but an insatiable appetite for more. Always consuming, never satisfied. There's no number that they'll reach in their bank account that will satisfy them.

[25 : 51] There's no amount of elevation at work that will make them feel like they've arrived. There's no situation with friends or reputation that will give them satisfaction.

They always want more, they need more. It's as if they are drinking salt water. Their bellies are full but they are always thirsty for more.

They have a disordered view of what brings life. They also confuse shame with glory. And such living, Paul is saying, like, it might seem like it is full of bounty but it is dripping with death.

It's dripping with destruction. It is on the road to perdition. In 1995, Pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical.

In English, it was called The Gospel of Life. And he describes this reality, again, this is in 1995, a remarkable paper he wrote.

[27 : 01] He calls this, what Paul is summing up in verse 19, 18 and 19, he calls this the conspiracy against life and the culture of death.

Such clarity in this explanation. He doesn't paper over it. He doesn't try to explain it away. But within our culture, within modernity, this push for materialism, for self-expression, for pleasure above all things, it is a conspiracy against life.

It is a culture of death. I was talking to Christine about it this week and she mentioned about how our culture for women especially is it is precisely this.

It's a conspiracy against life. It is a culture of death. Women are only valued if they can bring pleasure, if they look beautiful, if they can be a means to satisfy the desires of men and when women begin to age, they become, and Christine, this is her term, not mine, they become spent foul.

Their purpose begins to start descending, so to speak. Their worth begins to descend.

[28 : 39] Our culture, when it puts an emphasis on pleasure and consumption and on individualism, what ends up happening is that we treat those whom God has made in his image as commodities and when those commodities run out, we discard them.

The example she gave, interestingly, I wish Christine's not here this morning, but the example that she gave, and she'd be nodding, is, I guess, the Jenner mom just got a new face, she said.

And for a woman in her 70s, she looks incredibly not 70. But the fact that that is what brings her worth, it really exposes how such a type of thinking is not a thinking that leads to life but leads to death.

Mama Jenner has worth because she is made in the image of God. And age can't take that away from her. Age can't take that away from you or me. This is the great problem.

This is the conspiracy against life. This is the culture of death. month. And it's all around us. You can think of other examples.

[30 : 08] We are in the month of pride in our city and in our country. A month that does not lead to human flourishing for it cannot lead to human flourishing.

It cannot produce life and it leads to death. That's one month. We live in 24-7 of consumerism.

Same thing. Paul is saying imitate me as I imitate Christ because you will imitate something and the current is flowing really hard against godly living.

Imitate me as I imitate Christ. Focus on the things that matter because there's a lot of things that distort. Look with me at verses 20 and 21 because I think here is where the antidote lies.

If Paul just paused it here or put a period at verse 19 and said listen avoid these people then I think we would be in a really difficult situation because we wouldn't understand how to access the power to avoid such people but Paul doesn't end in verse 19.

He continues on verse 20 and 21. Look with me at verses 20 starting verse 20. But our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a savior the lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

[31 : 43] Humanity was not created solely for this temporal life not for this mortal life that we live in but to be with Christ forever. forever. All of our deepest longings are our deepest desires they cannot be fulfilled in this world.

For those united to Christ through faith and his gracious gift on the cross the resurrection of the dead it promises a life that far far far far surpasses all other promises in this life.

It tells us that true godly worship must always lead to life and God has made a way for that to be so.

The promise is that Christ's redemption will leave no aspect of this life untouched unredeemed.

Listen if this life can promise the best surgeons to make us look young but the fact is death is just knocking at the door the resurrection offers us not just a degree better but infinity better than that.

No part of the human condition will be untouched which means no cell in your body no muscle fiber no beating heart no vein no sinew no molecule inside of you will not be redeemed by Christ to never to never experience decay.

[33 : 14] In heaven I wonder this is speculation it's found nowhere in God's holy word I wonder if cancer will be like permanently forgotten in our brains in heaven if something like diabetes or or some kind of immune issue or Parkinson disease or whatever dementia it's not just that it doesn't exist in heaven we will have no concept of it I don't know but certainly every aspect of the resurrection will touch us it will also mean that betrayal will not be a thing in the life to come that heartache will not be a thing in the life to come the possibility of offense will not be a possibility in the life to come and how will this happen look again at the second part of verse 21 by the power that enables him that is Christ even to subject all things to himself this means that the heavenly power of God who raised

Jesus from the dead Jesus ascending into heaven sitting at the right hand of God where everything will be subject to him that power is the very same power that will infuse and touch and transform our bodies into something that we can we can only hope to get a little sliver of a glimpse of through Christ Jesus we will be 100% outfitted for eternity with him it's really good news wonderful news in fact it's great news but here we are citizens of heaven but we're still here on earth with all the struggles with all of the influencers with all of those that would would speak sweet words of life that are really horrendous words of death they are still whispering in our ear our hearts are divided how can we then keep our gaze upon heavenly things how can we remember that our citizenship is in heaven how can we live anti-fragile spiritually mature lives and leads us to our final point verse 1 and verse 4 in two weeks we'll return to verses 2 and 3 in a bit more detail we'll touch on them briefly but this is what it says this is our third point how to stand we'll read verse 1 therefore my brothers and sisters here's that affection kind of oozing out therefore my brothers and sisters whom I love and I long for my joy and crown stand firm thus in the Lord my beloved continues on I entreat Judea and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord yes I ask you also true companion help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life rejoice in the Lord always again I say rejoice listen there's no reason to tell somebody to stand firm if they are secure and rested and they're feeling 100% charged you tell someone to stand firm if they are weary and worn and this is the reality of this life when the tide seems to be against us and the reality for such a heavenly citizenship is that the earthly pull is it's difficult to push against but the call here is to stand firm and specifically in the truth of who Christ is and his victory upon the cross and the power that he gives by his

Holy Spirit it will give us the ability to discern right from wrong give us the strength we need to both embrace the gospel every day to imitate others as they are following Christ and to imitate Christ himself and I'll say that there is no promise that life will get easier but what will happen is that things will get put in the right perspective and we will not fear things like we have feared them in the past so case in point and again we're not going to jump into it Paul here he is walking towards this conflict that is happening in Philippi between these two godly women who are leaders in the church he is walking towards the problem because number one he is not going to be shaken in this situation and number two because the transformed life that embraces the gospel will always seek to do what

Christ himself does which is to heal and to restore and to reconcile and just in case we think that again this is a recipe for a very difficult life that will be full and fraught of with all sorts of headaches and dark clouds that follow us around verse four rejoice in the Lord always again I say rejoice and Paul returns once again to this proclamation that in the gospel there is joy abounding for all let us pray father in heaven thank you for this wonderful of what it means to be spiritually mature to be people that is turning towards a life that is anti-fragile a life that is secure and stable not because of our own willpower not because of our own digging deep but because we have looked outside of ourselves to you and that you give liberally you give generously and

[39 : 06] Lord we thank you for this wonderful truth Lord it is a high calling but we ask for your help as a community of Christians as this church help us to strive to have this same mind together that we would embrace the gospel together and look to bless one another and to seek blessing from others Lord we ask that you bless us even now and bless the remainder of our service and we pray this in Christ's mighty name Amen