

What Is Your Chief End?

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- [0 : 00] We'll begin our worship together by singing to God's praise in Psalm 29 in the Scottish Psalter version, page 238 of the psalm books. We're singing from verse 1 to verse 5. The tune is Amazing Grace, and this psalm reminds us of coming into the presence of God, coming to worship our Lord. Give ye unto the Lord, ye sons, that of the mighty be all strength and glory to the Lord, with cheerfulness give ye. And to the Lord the glory give, that to his name is due, and in the beauty of holiness unto Jehovah. So we come to worship God with these words, verse 1 to 5, to God's praise.
- Give ye unto the Lord Jesus, that of the mighty be all strength and glory to the Lord, the Lord with cheerfulness give ye. And to the Lord the glory give, that to his name is due.
- And in the beauty of holiness unto Jehovah.
- God of majesty, the thunder and on multitude of water set doth he. A powerful voice, O majesty, the thunder and on multitude of water set doth he. A powerful voice, O Tumres That comes out from the Lord most high.
- The voice of that great Lord is full of glorious majesty.
- [3 : 14] The voice of the eternal God.
- Asunder, see, the same. Yea, God the Lord does see the spring.
- That left and on does pay. Amen. Let's join together in prayer.
- Now let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you anew for this day. We thank you for the blessing that is ours to come to worship you and to praise your name together.
- And we thank you for these words that we've sung together that remind us of how worthy you are of all our worship. That you are the only one who is worth worshipping in this world.
- [4 : 29] And we thank you that as we come to worship, we have that reminder that you are a God who speaks to us. That your word is powerful and mighty. And even as we've sung that the voice of the Lord is a powerful voice that comes from you on most high.
- And we pray that together as we worship you, we will know your blessing upon us. That each one of us, Lord, will hear you and seek to know you more and more.
- That as we learn about you, as we learn through your word in the church here and in Sunday school and Cresce and Tweenies as well.
- That your word will be beautiful for us. That it will be something that we treasure. Something that we love to hear and to read for ourselves as well.
- And teach us by it, Lord. That you will show us your goodness and mercy all the days of our lives. And that you will remind us that in you is all beauty and glory.
- [5 : 30] We can be distracted by so many things in this world. And even from a young age, we can be caught up in looking for the things of this world that we think will satisfy us.
- Whether it's technology or friendships or whatever it may be that lead us away from you. But help us, Lord, to know you as a great friend who stays close to us.

So bless us together now, Lord. Be with us. Be with all the young ones here today as we will shortly go out to the Sunday school. Lord, bless them and be with them. And gather us all in your name here just now.

And watch over us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. It's good for us to be together worshipping God.

We enjoy, I hope, worshipping God in different times during the week as well. We worship him as we come and read his word together. And we do that by ourselves as well.

[6 : 29] It's good to read God's word. He speaks to us through it. That's what that psalm that we reminded us of. That the Lord's voice is a powerful voice.

And he speaks to us. I just want to think for a minute about where our treasure is. In the Gospel of Luke, we read there in chapter 12, verse 34.

And it says these words, For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. So there's a question there for us. Where is your treasure?

Treasure. And what is your treasure? Has anyone ever done a treasure hunt? I'm sure a number of you have done treasure hunts at different points. Whether it's maybe at a birthday party.

Maybe it's at a special time of year. Very often at Easter time, there's a treasure hunt. Or it might have been if you were at the holiday clubs the last couple of summers.

[7 : 30] Or the explorers groups as well. And you think about treasure hunts. And what do you need when you're doing a treasure hunt? Well, you need things like either a clue or a map.

So if you're going by clues, you find one clue, you read it, and it will show you then where you go to find the next clue. And you hope eventually you're going to find the treasure.

Or if you've got a map, it does the same thing, but in a different way. The map will show maybe places you have to go to. And it will show you the way to get there. It will show you maybe lines on the map.

And you've got to follow these tracks, finding your way until you find the treasure. And what's more exciting? Is it looking and searching?

Or is it when you find the treasure? Because sometimes you might find a treasure and you might be disappointed with it. You might think, is that it? Because after all that time hunting, is this all I get?

[8 : 29] Maybe just a little pack of sweets or something like that. And you think, oh, I should have got so much more. I put so much effort into it. Well, the Bible tells us that when we look to God, that we'll never be disappointed.

And every one of us here, not just the young ones, every one of us here, from the youngest to the oldest, we're all on a treasure hunt in life. We're all looking for something that's going to satisfy us, that's going to make us happy and make us glad when we find it.

But so often we're looking in the wrong place. And that's why Jesus says here, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

There will your heart be also. And that means, what do you love? What do you love in this life? Are you looking for treasure away from God that you think, this is what's going to make me happy?

Or are you looking for the treasure that God offers in his word? That he gives us his own son to be our treasure. That he gives us his word to show us the way to him.

[9 : 38] We're on a journey, every one of us. We're on a treasure hunt. But what treasure are we looking for? And where is our heart today? Does your heart love God and his word?

Or does your heart love other things in this world? The Bible tells us to love the Lord our God with all our heart. And then we'll find our treasure in him.

And we'll rejoice all the days of our lives. So we're all on a treasure hunt. And let's all pray that our hearts will be seeking the right treasure.

The treasure that God offers us in his son, Christ Jesus. Well, let's say the Lord's Prayer together now. Amen. Amen.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

[10 : 41] And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.

Amen. Amen. We're going to sing again to God's praise, this time in Psalm 40. Again, we're in the Scottish Psalter version, Psalm 40, page 260 of the Psalm books.

We're going to sing from verse 7 to verse 10, the end of double verse 10, the tune is martyrdom. Then to the Lord, these were my words. I come, behold and see, within the volume of the book it written is of me.

To do thy will I take delight. O thou my God that art, yea, that most holy law of thine I have within my heart. It's about the treasure of having God's word in our hearts and to do God's will.

So we'll sing from verse 7 to 10 to God's praise. pers, yes. Amen. Thanks. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Then to the Lord is where my words I come behold and see.

[12 : 05] Within the volume of the book a treasure is of me.

To do thy will I take delight. O come, my God, that art, yea, that most holy love of night.

I have within my heart. Within the congregation grave, I rise just as to preach.

Though thou just so, O Lord, that I regret and not my speech.

I never parted within my heart until thy righteousness.

[13 : 48] I thy salvation have declared and shown thy faithfulness.

Thy kindness which most loving is. Conceal the lamb, not I.

Not from the congregation grave. I have within my heart.

I am. I am. I am. We're going to turn to reading God's Word in 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians. We take up our reading in chapter 3 and at verse 6.

And we read down into chapter 4 down to the end of verse 12. 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, reading from verse 6.

[15 : 13] Now that Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. And reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you.

For this reason, brothers, in all our desires and affliction, we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live if you are standing fast in the Lord.

For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you? For all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day, that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts, blameless in holiness, before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

[16 : 41] For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles, who do not know God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man, but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. For that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders, and be dependent on no one.

And so on. And may God add his blessing to that reading of his word. Again, join together in prayer. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, you are a holy God, who we have no right to approach in so many ways, for we are unworthy of it.

[18 : 23] We are unclean before you because of our sin. We should not be able to stand upon the very holy ground that you give to us.

And yet we thank you that you are a God who has opened a way for us to come through a name that is mighty, a name that is powerful, the one who is your own Son, Jesus Christ, that we have been taught through him how to approach you, even how we approach you in prayer.

As he taught the disciples, we are reminded ourselves that that is how we can come to call upon you as our Father in heaven. And we thank you that there is that wonderful power in that relationship that we come, bringing all our cares and concerns to you, but first and foremost, giving you praise and honor and glory.

And we do thank you, too, that we have instruction as to how we are to live and that we are to seek to please you more and more as we have read in these words before us.

And as we come to study them, Lord, as we seek to learn from them, may you help us to have teachable hearts and to know the power of your Spirit speaking to us that we would not grieve you.

[19 : 47] We thank you that you are one, even as we've read in these words, too, who has given his Holy Spirit to us. And we pray, Lord, that we would not seek to grieve that Holy Spirit, that we would not seek to turn away from you as many have done and as many still do, but that we would seek all the more to walk closely with you, to walk humbly before you and to walk in a manner worthy of you.

And we know that we cannot do this alone. And we pray, Lord, for your grace and your mercy to help, to help us in all our different needs, that we would keep our eyes fixed on you, that we would look to Jesus as the one who is the author, the perfecter of faith.

And even as a people of faith, Lord, we know how far short we fall and how dependent we are upon you day by day. And so, Lord, may you continue to build us up as your people.

May you work in us to make us into the people you would have us to be, to take away the many blemishes that are in our hearts and in our lives, Lord.

We know that we will never be perfect in this world, but we seek, Lord, to be a people who will always look to please you in whatever way we can. And we thank you that you do not leave us alone in this, but as we will study your word together today, we are reminded that you are working in us.

[21 : 20] And we pray that we would know it and that your church would know it and that the world would know it, that you are a God who is mighty to work, that you are a God who is mighty to change, to change even the most wicked of heart and to use it for your glory.

So, Lord, we pray your blessing upon us as a people, upon your word as it goes out today, that powerful word. Lord, we thank you that it is so powerful because it is sent from you.

It is not the words of men, but the words of God. And we pray that it will be heard far and wide today, that it will be received with great gladness and humbling and repenting today.

And we pray that throughout the world, that as your word goes out, Lord, you would accompany it with your blessing. blessed to us here as well, Lord, as we commit ourselves to you.

And in this coming week, Lord, we ask that you would go before us to teach us by your spirit and by your word in all things. And as we look ahead to a communion time in our midst, Lord, we pray for a sense, a real sense of your peace and your blessing over us, a sense of your building us up together as a people in brotherly love as we have read of in this passage as well.

[22 : 43] That you would unite us in the cords of love and under the banner of the gospel to rejoice in your goodness to us. That we would make sure our treasure is found in you.

That we would seek first the kingdom of God and that all other things would be added unto us. And so, Lord, guide us in this week ahead. Guide us collectively and individually as well, we pray that as we approach a communion season we would do so prayerfully, praying for one another and praying for ourselves too and praying for your glory to be in our midst.

Bless the preachers who will come to minister to us. We pray for each of them who will be involved in the communion weekend. We pray for Reverend Angus McRae and the Reverend Carl MacDonald as they prepare for the weekend ahead, Lord, that you will guide them by your spirit that you will give them the words to speak.

Words that will both challenge and convict us but also encourage us and build us up. We pray for a real sense of unity in our time together.

We pray too, Lord, for all aspects of your church not just here in our midst but throughout our islands, throughout our presbytery here. we pray for all our congregations as we begin our communion season again, Lord.

[24 : 09] We pray that there will be a sense of your pouring out your spirit over us as a people, reviving us in our hearts and building up your church. We pray that throughout our land, Lord, that your church will be blessed by you, that you would build it up in our midst and restore our land once again to be a place where your name is lifted high, a place where your name is glorified, where we would not be ashamed of the name of Jesus Christ, that we would lift it up as a banner over us, the banner that is so needed in our day and in our times.

We pray that that as your people go out in the world far and wide to all ends of the earth, we thank you that you have your people called to minister to young and old, to men and women throughout all the many countries of this world, even from our own midst here, Lord, we thank you that you have called people to serve you and we pray for them, Lord, we pray your blessing over everyone of your people, many who would feel perhaps isolated and lonely at times, fearful even, and yet, Lord, to know the great courage that you are able to give, the blessing of knowing that you are with them.

We pray that for all of us, Lord, together as a people in homes and families and all our different needs, that we would know your great faithfulness to us, Lord, that you never leave us or forsake us.

And we pray, Lord, for many who may be needing you in different ways of times of ill health, times of grief and sorrow, times of falling away from you in different ways.

we pray, Lord, that your voice, that mighty voice would be heard by you, by your people near and far. Continue to bless us throughout this day, Lord, watch over us, hear our prayers collectively together and individually too, that as we offer up our thanks and our praise to you, it will be acceptable before you.

[26 : 18] And we ask all these things knowing our sin, knowing the sin of our hearts and thought, word, and inaction as well. And we pray forgiveness for all our sin.

Cleanse us anew, we pray, and go before us now in all things, teaching us by your Spirit to walk closely with you as we ask it in Jesus' precious name.

Amen. Amen. Before we turn back to look at our passage this morning together, we'll sing in Psalm 15. Psalm 15, in the Sing Psalms version, in page 16 of the Psalm books, we can sing the whole of this Psalm.

The tune is St. Andrew. Psalm 15, Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place, and who upon your holy hill may live before your face, whoever walks a blameless path, who acts in righteousness, and who will always from the heart sincerely truth express.

We'll sing the whole of this Psalm to God's praise. Amen. Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place, and who upon your holy hill may live before your face, who ever walks a blameless path, who acts in righteousness, and who will always from the heart, sincerely truth express.

[28 : 35] He casts no blood on anyone, nor does his day in the wrong.

He has no sight within his heart, or slander on his tongue.

He on the soul to fear the Lord, the worthless in his eyes.

He gives the oath which he has sworn, however high the price.

He lets his money and no charge, no pride can he during the death ■ will always stand secure.

[30 : 16] Well, we can turn back together for a time to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. We're going to look at verse 1 to 8 in particular together. Just now we can read from verse 1 there.

Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

For you know that the instruction we gave through the Lord Jesus, for this is the will of God, your sanctification, and so on.

The title of this morning's sermon is What is Your Chief End? And I'm sure there's many of you here who will be familiar with that question.

It's a question perhaps you've been familiar with from a very young age. What is the chief end of man? Now, if you don't know where it's from, if you're new to that question, then it's from the Shorter Catechism, which has been an important source of teaching throughout the church for many generations now.

[31 : 29] The Shorter Catechism is a collection of questions and answers all based on the Word of God. Here's one example of that.

It's a book. Sometimes it's much smaller. This actually contains the Westminster Confession of Faith along with the Shorter Catechism and the Longer Catechism.

So you have these three different documents in one book, but very often you find they come individually as well. And the Shorter Catechism book is sometimes just a very small book.

And for many of us, we learned it in our young age. And perhaps for some, maybe the only question that you remember is, what is the chief end of man?

And you know, the answer perhaps, the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. But what does that mean?

[32 : 24] What does the question mean? And what does the answer mean? They're both important for us to understand, even what Paul is writing to the Thessalonians here.

What is the chief end? What is our purpose in life? That's really what the question is asking. What is our purpose?

And then the answer to that question is, our chief end, our purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Glorify God means to give him all the worship and praise that is due to him. But what does it mean to enjoy him and to enjoy him forever?

Maybe we think that's something that's further down the road. That's something maybe even for eternity, that that's when we will enjoy him. But it's not just for eternity.

[33 : 24] Yes, there's a sense of the day will come when we will fully enjoy him in that sense. But that's not to say that there shouldn't be any enjoying him today and all the days of our lives.

And we enjoy him by growing in him. And that's what this passage that we're looking at together is all about. Enjoying him.

And as Paul is writing to the church at Thessalonica here, he's writing to them, seeking this for them, that they will be growing in the Lord, that they will be going on in the strength of the Lord.

And he's doing this in the way that he's asking them many different questions to encourage them along the way. And one question that you could maybe draw from the reading that we've had today is, are they the finished article?

And when we think of Paul writing to them, we think of him speaking to ourselves through his word today as well. Are we the finished article? If you look back just to the end of chapter 3 there where we read the encouraging, the report that they had coming back from Thessalonica, Paul was not there anymore.

[34 : 40] He was writing to them to hear how they were. But Timothy had come back to him with a report. And the report gave him great comfort and great joy because he was hearing that they were going on in their faith.

The question there is, how is your faith? And you could almost answer there for them, their faith was strong. They were going on in the Lord.

But Paul's great concern and encouragement was that they keep going, that they press on, that they don't lose heart along the way, that they don't enter into trials and temptations that will make them fall away from walking closely with the Lord.

And so he's writing to encourage them. So after all has been said in this letter up until this point, now he's focusing, as you come into chapter 4, how are we going to go forward?

How are we going to go on from here? And that's something every Christian should always have in mind. Every one of us should have in mind, whether we're Christians here or not, whether we're looking for the Lord.

[35 : 53] The question is always in the back of our mind, where are we going from here? Where are we going from this service today? What direction are we going in? What are we leaning on for help and understanding?

This week was a school report week, a parents' evening in the Nicholson, which we were at. And as with any parent evening, it's always a time of looking at where the child is now, which is important.

But what always comes up is the pathway for going forward. What needs to be done to achieve their aim, their goal, or their career. There's always a sense of a pathway going forward.

And for Paul, this is almost like a report that's coming back from Thessalonica, where God's children are being reported on their faith strong.

They're in a good place just now. They're standing fast in the Lord, as it says in verse 8 of chapter 3. They're standing fast in the Lord. That's great.

[37 : 01] But now as you come into chapter 4, it's, but what's the pathway going forward? Where do they go? from here. And he's already encouraged them in their walk with the Lord.

In verse 12 of chapter 2, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

So they were charged, they were called to this, to walk in a manner worthy of God. Their pathway was put before them. But now he's reminding them and challenging them to keep going in this way.

But there's a great reminder here too for them and for us that even if we feel that we're falling short in so many ways.

And the reminder is what we have in verse 3. For this is the will of God, your sanctification. that God is working in them.

[38 : 08] And God is working in you and me. That he doesn't leave us alone in this pathway, in this life of seeking to please him.

It's not in our own strength that we go on, but through him who works in us for his glory. And when we think of that in light of what is our chief end, what is our main purpose, what is our pathway going forward, we ask, well, is it to worship and glorify God?

And is it to enjoy him now and forever? And so there's three things I want us to take from these verses before us this evening.

How we see God working in us. And the first thing is in the opening verses of chapter 4, we see Paul encouraging them to please God more and more.

To please God more and more. Our lives are so often dictated by goals and targets.

[39 : 17] When you think of a parent's evening and setting out pathways and goals in life, they're important. But it's also important to remind children and ourselves the goal of knowing God is the greatest of all.

Because we can get so easily distracted by pathways and lives and career paths and goals in life. It's in every aspect of life these days.

Targets to be met. Whether it's in sports, targets to be met, personal bests to be gained. Whether it's in work, targets that we're set, production, or earning certain amount of money, all of these things.

And then you have life targets, relationships, and personal targets, cars and houses and promotions and all of these things. The list can go on where we see a pathway in life that is all about us and satisfying ourselves and achieving our own goals.

And whether you look at Paul's day or our own day, that's common. It's common in every generation and every aspect of life where we can get so entangled in our own goals.

[40 : 39] And our purpose becomes not to glorify God but to make glory for ourselves. And not to enjoy him forever but to enjoy life forever as we see it.

And it's so easy to go on the wrong path, the wrong way. And that's the warning that's behind what Paul is writing to them here. He knows this fact.

He knows the distractions that are so often all around in his day and God's speaking to us today as well. And so as he's writing here he's saying, yes, your faith is strong at the moment.

You're standing in the Lord but where are you going? Where are you going from here? And so he says there in verse 1, finally then brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God just as you are doing that you do so more and more.

That this is your ongoing chief end, chief purpose to please God, to enjoy him more and more.

[41 : 48] A life pleasing to God. And is that the life that you are living, that I am living today? Is that my chief end, my chief purpose today to live a life pleasing God more and more?

And the question is, well, how? How do we please God? How do we know what is right to do and what is wrong to do? How do we decide what is morally right and what is morally wrong?

You see the context of Paul writing here was a lot of morality, a lot of moral issues that were pulling them away from God. And it's the same in our own world too.

These issues of life are still always there, seem to pull us away from God. And how do we know what is right and what is wrong? We can base it on what we've been brought up with.

And that's fine if we've been privileged and blessed with a Christian upbringing, our morals coming from the Bible, but what about when that changes? What if that's never what we've had?

[42 : 57] What if we base what is right and wrong on present culture and ways of thinking and laws? If a law changes to say something that was wrong is now right, or even the other way around, something that was right is now wrong.

How do we know? What do we base it on? Francis Schaeffer once said, if there is no absolute by which to judge society, then society is absolute.

If there is no absolute by which to judge society, then society is absolute. And is there an absolute for us?

Well, if we believe in God and we believe in his word, there is, because it is found in the word of God. That is our absolute guide, our absolute instruction, our absolute way to our chief end to please God is not through society's absolutes, but through the word of God.

And our prayer would be that society's absolutes would come from the word of God. But when they don't, we still remain in God's word, because our desire should be to please God more and more.

[44 : 24] And that's a clear warning in Scripture. If we seek to please self, we'll never please God. Romans 8, verse 8, those who are in the flesh cannot please God, it says.

And then Romans 12 goes on to outline how we can please God. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

We find it in the word of God. God. He's saying, please God more and more. The question for them was, are they?

And the question for us is, are we? Is that our chief end, to please God more and more? We're always challenged.

I mean, you think of Psalm 15, who can stand before the Lord? And there's so many things there that if you go through them, you think, I can't. I can't stand before God.

[45 : 34] He who honors, who fears the Lord, he who does right to his neighbor, he who has no spite in his heart or no slander in his tongue. You go through that list and you think, how is it possible for anyone to stand before God?

And that's the reality for us too. How can any of us please God more and more? We know it's impossible. Is a life pleasing to God about making changes ourselves?

Well, that's the second thing we want to see here. Because if you read verse 2 to 4 and go through that yourself without the first sentence of verse 3, if you leave out the first part of verse 3, for this is the will of God, your sanctification, you leave that out and read verse 2 to 4, you think, I can try and do that myself.

And this is the way many people try to approach God. We hear what God's word says and what we're going to do is we're going to make all the changes in our own lifestyle.

We're going to make all the changes in our own hearts by ourselves. We're going to manage this. We're going to do it. We're going to set a goal. We're going to achieve it. We've got the pathway marked out before us.

[46 : 49] I'm going to be someone whose chief end, whose chief purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. And we try and do it ourselves. But does it work?

It doesn't. We end up failing because without God it's impossible to please him. And that's the beauty of this verse.

That's the beauty of what God teaches us in his word. It is God who works in us. And that's why you have the beginning of verse 3.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification. God working in us. John Newton once famously said, I'm not what I ought to be.

And I'm guessing we could all say these things. I'm not what I want to be. I'm not what I hope to be in another world. But still, I am not what I once used to be.

[47 : 51] But by the grace of God, I am what I am. By the grace of God, I am what I am.

You see, John Newton didn't try and change his own life. He knew that only the Lord could, and his grace could. And that is what we need to remember ourselves as well.

That it is God who can change us. And that's the wonder of this passage, how God knows us, and how God gives us these encouragements along the way.

The blessing of these words should not go past us, because we can all find that sense of struggling along by ourselves, looking at ourselves and thinking, if only I could please God, but I can't.

And we're trying to go on leaning on our own strength. But Paul is saying, look, even when you're standing firm in the Lord, don't get complacent. Don't think you've arrived, don't think you've made it.

[49 : 02] Instead, keep looking to the Lord, to please him more and more, knowing the will of God is your sanctification.

Now, what is sanctification? That's important for us to know what Paul is saying to us here. When we're thinking that instead of our chief end is to please ourselves, we're wanting our chief end to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, what makes the difference?

It is God working in us. And again, we can come back to the shorter catechism, which again gives us an answer for what is sanctification.

sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness.

It is the work of God's free grace, where we are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness.

[50 : 13] And we think, can I ever make it? Well, again, we come back to the fact that it is God working in us.

A man once bought a new house. And in the backyard of his house, there was a tree, a tree just standing by itself, and he didn't know what kind of tree it was.

Nothing marked this tree out in any significant way, because he bought the tree in winter. When spring came, leaves and tiny little buds started appearing on the tree.

And for a few days, he marveled at this tree. What a beautiful tree. It's got these beautiful flowers. And he enjoyed them for a few days, but then a wind came, and within a few hours, all the leaves and all the flowers were gone.

they were scattered all over the back garden. And he was so disappointed. What a mess. What a worthless tree this is.

[51 : 22] This tree isn't of any use after all, he thought. But then the summer came, and he noticed during the summer that there were these small buds now on the tree, but the size of a large nut.

And he thought, oh, it must be a fruit tree. And so he took down one of the buds, and he bit into it, and he spat it out immediately. Tasted horrible, so sour.

And he thought, again, what a worthless tree. It can't even bear good fruit. I'm going to cut this tree down in winter. But then come the autumn, and what did he notice on the tree?

But a large produce of red apples. It had taken time, but from the wee blossoming buds that had been seemingly blown away to the sour-tasting fruit that he thought was being produced in the summer, he realized that the tree itself had been taken from the ground all this time to produce a ripe crop of apples.

And that's a reminder to us of what the work of sanctification is like. Can we bear fruit by ourselves?

[52 : 45] No. Will we make mess of our life over and over again sometimes? Yes. Will our fruit sometimes be sour and bitter?

Yes. But it is God who is working in us, that we might bear fruit at some point that is good.

And it may be that it's always a mix of all the different ones, but our desire, our chief end should be to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

We can so easily lose heart because of our mistakes, and especially if we're thinking we can do it by ourselves. We can't, but we remember God is working in you.

God is making you into what he wants you to be, useful and giving all glory to him. Mistakes along the way, yes.

[53 : 52] Bitterness and sourness along the way, yes. But that we might have a produce, a harvest at the end. And that's the last point I just wanted to take from this passage.

What is the outcome of our sanctification? What is he looking at that we might be holy? In verse seven it says, for God has not called us for impurity but in holiness.

holiness. What is a holy person? We have our own idea perhaps what a holy person is. A holy person is someone who goes to church.

A holy person is someone who reads their Bible. But is that what the Bible means by what a holy person is? At the root of what being holy means and the idea of being holy is being set apart.

And so when you come to worship God we worship a holy God. He is the one who is to be set apart and worthy of all our worship.

[55 : 06] In Exodus 20 the ten commandments the first commandment is you shall have no other gods before me. There shall be nothing else in your pathway nothing else as your treasure nothing else as your chief end but God.

You shall have no other gods before me because he is a holy God. And before that in Exodus 15 it had said who is like you O Lord among the gods who is like you majestic in holiness awesome in glorious deeds doing wonders.

There is no other God like our Lord. And therefore he is a holy God and that is how we are to worship him. As a holy God set apart.

But what does holiness mean for ourselves? You see it in different parts of scripture where we are told to be holy because God is holy.

C.S. Lewis once said how little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing it is irresistible.

[56 : 21] Holiness is a beautiful thing. Holiness is a precious thing. A thing that we should be aspiring for. And that's what Paul is speaking of here. As you seek to please God more and more.

As you seek to go on in this way being sanctified by God. God working in us. It is to be a beautiful thing. Set apart for the worship of God.

Holiness is so important for us. And why is it so important? Because we're given a warning there in verse 8 of this chapter.

Whoever disregards this disregards not man but God. When we disregard these things we disregard God himself.

And when we do that we cannot be holy. Hebrews 12 14 says to us as well strive for peace with everyone for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

[57 : 28] Well do we want to see God? Do we want to enjoy him forever? Do we want him to be our chief purpose glorifying him and enjoying him always?

I pray we all do. That that would be our longing that that would be our desire and remembering we don't do it just by ourselves.

And if you feel that you are struggling if you are feeling that you are failing to please God in this way if you are failing to achieve what Psalm 15 describes for us no you're not alone.

because we all fall short. Every one of us falls short of the glory of God. That is what God's word says to us.

But what we want to know is God working in us. You think of someone holy in your own mind and you say to yourself I can never be like that.

[58 : 41] God's eternal inimitable Jesus looks on the inside.

God looks on the heart. Not on the outside. And that's what we think of here as Paul is writing to the Thessalonians. He's encouraged that they are standing fast in the Lord yes, but he wants them to have the right pathway going forward as well, the right direction in their lives, to keep living a life pleasing to God as much as they possibly can, but knowing to God working in them that they might be holy and set apart for God.

Would that be our desire? Would that be our longing? Is that your chief end, your chief purpose? To please God, to know him working in you, that you might be holy and set apart by him and for him.

God working in us. What a wonderful privilege that God would take you and I, imperfect as we are, with all our faults, all the mess that we make, all the sourness and bitterness that we have, and seek to make us fruitful for him, a thing of beauty to him, set apart for him. May he work in us for his glory. Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your work in us, an ongoing work, and a work we know even in our own hearts is so needed because we cannot do it by ourselves. And we just pray, Lord, that you will have mercy on us for all our bitterness, our sourness, all the mess that we make in our life, and that you would make us fruitful, set apart for your glory. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

[60 : 50] Amen. We're going to close by singing to God's praise in Psalm 40, the Sing Psalms version this time, Psalm 40, and the last two verses there on page 52. The tune is Finart, Psalm 40 at verse 16, page 52. But let all those who seek your face be joyful in you all their days. Let those who love salvation say, exalted be the Lord always. We'll sing these last two stanzas to God's praise.

Let those who love salvation say, exalted be the Lord always. And let us pray. And let us know in this verse 1. But let all those who seek your face be joyful in you all their days. Let those who love of salvation say exalted be the Lord always yet I am poor and in great need Lord think on me I am humbly pray you are my saviour and my help come oh my

God do not delay after the benediction I'll go to the main door we'll close with the benediction now may grace mercy and peace from God Father Son and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forevermore Amen going flow ma doc come on go ■
Thank you.