

# Shine Like Stars

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] But can I just say it's a great privilege and an honor to be the pastor of any church, but especially this church. I like the links that you have with Charlotte Chapel, and I've got to know people here over the number of years, at least maybe at a distance. And whenever I've been in your company, I know you're a good praying church. You love the Lord, you wear your faith on your sleeve, which wasn't the case in my last church, and they're more reserved.

But it really is, you're a great bunch of folk, and I just hope I can rise to the occasion under God to lead and guide you, and really just to fill the gaps just now. I've never been an interim pastor before, so I think that's a pastor with restraints. I think that's how I'm seeing it. Just be careful, John, no innovations as such. You're here just to man the fort and see how the Lord leads and guides. So I hope I get the balance right with that, that I'm not just a passenger. I can suggest one or two wee things, but nothing major. It's a Lord of leads and guides, so that whoever comes, that I've not wearied you by thinking other things. So I just want to say that. It really is a privilege and an honour to be your pastor. And if you want any visits, I'm seeing one or two folk this week. I saw one or two folk last week. If you want a visit, just say, John, can you and Lucille pop over and see you sometime? I'd rather I was there because you wanted me to be there. There's nothing worse than a pastor if you rock up and they don't want you there. So if you want a visit, we'll crawl over Broken Glass to get there, so that would be great. Philippians chapter 2. Turn with me to Philippians chapter 2. I do want to give you a warm welcome, and those who are watching on Zoom as well, give you a very warm welcome as well. Hopefully you feel part of us. This morning I'm going to begin a new series in Philippians. After I chose this, and believe it or not, I've chosen the Songs of Ascent for tonight, and then the pastor's written a book. Wow, I've got that badly wrong. That's for sure. But we're going to stick with it. We'll stick with it and see. If the wheels come off, we can change. Nobody's going to die. We can do that. Philippians is a book that I've used, and this is now the sixth church of which I've been a pastor, and I've begun this series in most of the churches.

It's a good church. It's a good church about church growth, and we're looking at the principles of that this morning, and we will look at that over the coming weeks. In the evening, we will look at Songs of Ascent, and really that's, this is strategic. The one this evening, Songs of Ascent, are mostly for your heart, mostly to do with your own personal walk with the Lord, and hopefully the Lord will speak to you from that as well. So, we'll see. We'll see how we do under God, under his leading. But let's read Philippians chapter 2, just to set the tone for this letter. Let's read together the first 18 verses. Therefore, Paul says, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in Spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 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, as you hold firmly to the word of life.

[ 4 : 50 ] And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. 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 you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Let's ask for the Lord's help. Let's pray. Our loving Father, we come to your word now. We pray that you would speak to us from it. We pray that you will lead us and guide us as individuals and as a church. We thank you for this church at Philippi. We thank you that it was a good church that grew spiritually, that loved Paul and Paul loved them. And Father, we do just pray that as we study this book together, we pray that you would speak to us and that you would encourage in that which is good and challenge us and that which perhaps, Lord, we need to address. So Father, just lead us and guide us. Our desire is that we would be better disciples of Jesus Christ, that we would follow in his footsteps. So lead us and guide us. Bless us, we pray. We look to you for blessing. We look to you for growth. In Jesus' name. Amen. I wonder if I asked you this morning a question. What would you say, looking at the coronation and the world gazing in on all that was happening, what would you say is the greatest need of the world today? That's a big question, isn't it? What is the greatest need?

If you're not a Christian, you'll probably answer that in a different way. But even as a Christian, what would you say is the greatest need? You could say many things. You could say Jesus, couldn't you? You could say forgiveness. You could say eternal life. You could say a relationship with God, that people need this day by day. But then if I asked you, what would you say is the actual immediate need? What is the first thing that people need in the world just now? We know that they need Jesus and so forth. There's a well-known song, what the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of. What the world needs now is love, sweet love. No, not just for some, but for everyone. Lord, we don't need another mountain. There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb. There are oceans and rivers enough to cross, enough to last till the end of time. What the world needs now is love, sweet love. That song will be in your head for most of the day now. That's one person's Jackie DeShannon. That's his, the world needs love. And I'm sure you would agree with that.

The world does indeed need love. But what it needs first and foremost is light. I wonder if that was your answer. We live in a world in darkness, and before it can come to even be presented by Jesus, we need to be light bearers. The world very much needs light, first and foremost. When it receives light, it will receive the gospel, and our job is to do that. The passage that we read contains a verse which is basically the main verse in the whole book of Philippians. You'll find it in verses 15 and 16, where it says, shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. That's the 1984 version of the NIV. It says that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you, as a believer, shine like a star in the universe as you hold out the word of life. That's probably the key verse. Everything in this letter, Paul's desire is that this church shine like stars as they hold out the word of life. It's the main reason he's writing to this good church. They're already doing well, but he wants them to keep doing well. And in this whole area of shining in a world in darkness, a world that needs light. And that is our task. And it's a great verse, and this will form the backdrop of the series that I'll do with you.

Shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. I like this verse because it does two main things. It deals with Christian character, that you are to shine. You are to be this impressive, godly person, as you, Christian conduct, hold out the word of life. It deals with two. If we only concentrated in godliness, it wouldn't be quite enough. If we only concentrated in Christian service and evangelism, it wouldn't be enough. But this verse marries both of those two main things, that you're a godly Christian who shines for Jesus. And that's why it's a great verse, and I commend this verse to you. Over the years, most of my work has been to do with church revitalization or church planting. I've been a pastor in the early churches, but after that, it became more a kind of development. And I've read so many books on revitalization and church planting.

[ 10 : 20 ] But here is a book that I came across a number of years ago, and it was a breath of fresh air, because all these books on church planting and revitalization come across as a silver bullet.

This is the thing you need if you put these in place. Your church can't fail to grow. And this is a book by Kent Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*. If you want to be successful, do various things. And this book has chapters which say, success is faithfulness. Success is serving.

Success is loving. Success is believing, keeping the faith. Success is prayer. Success is holiness. And so it goes on. And in the book of Philippians, it's more like this book than some of these quick fix, how to grow your church over a weekend type of book. It takes you back to basics. It takes you back to elemental principles. And when I've been the pastor of churches, the remit that I set myself, it's never just to be doing church, but it's to be being church. That's more important, that you are the people that God wants you to be. You are these godly people who shine. And as you shine, the Lord, in my experience, will add to the church those he is saving. A social worker never puts a baby in with a family. If you've ever, we've had members in our churches that have adopted kids, and the hoops you have to jump through before you're given a baby are many. The same principle stands in the local church.

I don't believe God places newborn babes into a church which isn't healthy. So I never assume that everything is hunky-dory. My job is to encourage you to build you in the faith, as I constantly do this with myself as well. And the book of Philippians is good to do that. We're not studying the book of Galatians, which was a church that just went off the wall, and Paul has to scold them right at the beginning. The book of Philippians is a good church, and we'll look at how this was formed later on.

Well, when I finished a work at Nidra, I went to work for these guys, John Lewis. I worked for him for a—I was quite privileged to work with him. When Christmas comes, they take on about 80 people in Edinburgh, and 2,000 people apply for the job. So I had to beat 1,920 to get to work for John Lewis. So that wasn't bad. I knew somebody quite high up in personnel. That was the only way I got the job.

[ 13 : 04 ] And I did it for a few months before I started to work in Derbyshire. But it's the partnership part of John Lewis, which I quite liked. I don't know if they're going to do away with that. But the whole partnership—you don't just work for John Lewis. You're a partner in John Lewis. And in the cantina, whatever, there was a TV with just how well John Lewis is doing. We were there. I was there at the end of the year, and they're all wondering how the company's done, because they will reap the benefits of this, because they've partnered John Lewis as a company. It's a great thing. It's a great way of work. It encourages you to work better. The better you are as a partner, you get to reap the benefits. This was a church that partnered Paul in the gospel. And you see this right at the very beginning of chapter 1, verse 3, 4, and 5, I thank my God every time I remember you and all my prayers for you. I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Right at the very get-go, they partnered Paul. They stood with him. He promoted the gospel.

They stood with him. They helped him in practical ways. And this wasn't easy for them to do. I wonder if I asked you another question, how would you describe the world in which we live in?

Paul describes it for us in chapter 2, verse 15. We read this together, so that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation in which you shine. They had to shine in a warped and crooked generation.

Warped and crooked just means twisted. A society or a generation that's taken God, that's taken His Word, and twisted it to suit their own ends. It's not straight. It's not clear. This is the world in which we live in, a world that doesn't regard God's law, God's Word. It was great. I must confess, every time King Charles, he's kissing the Bible. He's doing all sorts of stuff. A defender of the faith. For me, that's his best title. Forget all these other titles. To be a defender of the faith.

That's quite something. It's quite militant. I quite like that personally as a bloke, to be a defender of the faith. You take the sword that Penny Mordaunt was carrying yesterday, and you use that for the gospel. That should excite you in a crooked and warped generation. This is a world today. There's no moral absolutes. The world will tolerate anything except intolerance, and we can be seen as intolerant.

[ 15 : 58 ] There's one way to God, Jesus Christ, to go, oh, that's very unloving. People can't live together under certain conditions. We have our rules, our standards, and the world don't tolerate that.

We live in a crooked and warped generation. It was the same in Jesus' day. Oh, unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you? Paul's world was no different. This church had to shine in a dark place, in a difficult place, where people's thinking is warped. It's twisted. It is not clear.

And we are to be conspicuous for Christ. I remember being part of Charlotte Chapel, the team there, when they were looking for a strap line, and that was the strap line they chose, conspicuous for Christ.

And that is what we have to do. The minute you're saved, the Lord is as if he puts a big 5,000 megawatt bulb on you, and you are to shine. He says, you are the light of the world, in Matthew 5.

A city on a hill cannot be hidden, neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

[ 17 : 21 ] Ephesians 5, Paul says, once you were darkness, now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. That is the immediate need of the world. It is our first and primary task, to live as children of light. Now, how does Paul encourage them? We will look through the letter over the coming weeks, but he mentions three things in the passage that we read, and I want to pick them out.

They're important things, and it's the context of these verses about shining like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. How do we do this? He tells us in this brief passage.

So, let's look at this fairly quickly this morning. First of all, he says, keep up the good work. Keep up. He's anxious that they were obedient, but they keep being obedient, and he mentions two things regarding good works. He mentions, first of all, the work of God itself, His work, and he reminds them right at the very start that this church was first and foremost founded by God. It was, well, next week we'll look at the ins and outs of how this church was formed. Paul never went out his way. He didn't plan this. I'm going to go to Philippi, and I'm going to plant a church there. It wasn't on his agenda for church revitalization or church planting. He was planning to go somewhere else, you remember, in Acts 16, and the Holy Spirit says, no, you're not going there. You're not going there. You're going there. The Macedonian call, come over and help us. They weighed this up, and it says, and we concluded that God wanted us to go to Europe, not to remain in Asia. Go to another continent, and there this church was planted in Philippi. It began very small, trying to find a place where people worship. As I said, we'll look at this more next time, but it was obviously a church that came into birth under the work of God, and you remember the people that were saved. There was Lydia, a businesswoman, probably quite well-to-do, quite gifted, and then after her, a slave girl, probably somebody completely different from Lydia, different social structure, and so forth, and then a Philippine jailer, a grafter in the jail, if you've ever met a prison warden. They can be pretty tough cookies. Anyway, a Philippine jailer.

It's probably not the folk you would have chosen to start a church, such a diverse group of people, but it's what God did. He took these people from different areas of society and brings them all together in one place. He transforms them. He makes them once in darkness and now angels of light, basically. They're not the same social unit, but He's creating light. God is beginning to create light. Yesterday, I spent ages trying to put wee lights under my new kitchen cupboards. The guy who was supposed to fit it decided they weren't worth fitting, so I said, well, I'll fit it, and make sure the wee LEDs all lined up, and it lights up, and I'm going, wow, I've just, what do you think of that?

Let's say, oh, I've just created light under your kitchen cabinets. Well, God is doing more than create light under a few kitchen cabinets. He's creating light in a difficult area, a place that's in darkness. He creates light. God is always at work. God was at work in this church over 50 years ago when He placed it in the heart and minds of people in Charlotte Chapel and others to come and to plant a church. It's great whenever I've pastored the church and founder members are still there. Those folk are great. We had one church. It was doctors and lawyers, and when an anniversary would come, they'd fire up photographs of them digging the foundations, doctors doing all stuff that they wouldn't do, and really giving themselves to this. And then 50 years later, if they're still there, these folk don't easily give up their church. They'll sweat for it, blood and sweat and so forth. They'll work for it. London was different. Folk come and go a couple of years, don't really care, get a tea, get a croissant, off they go, and you're wanting folk to be really committed. Die for the cause. Grow your church.

[ 22 : 01 ] And here is a thing that Paul wants them to do. So, secondly, the work of believers, to really work under God's leading and guiding to build the church here. And although that they were a work of God, they also needed to work. They needed to work alongside not just Paul, but work alongside God. Paul's anxious that they continue this new obedient life. Look at verse 12.

As you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. No, he's not saying continue to work for your salvation. He's not saying work and save yourself. That's not how we're saved, by working in the church. Some people do that. I remember at the dream mission early on, there were people who, a couple of folk who weren't really saved, but they thought they would have been saved if they just served in the mission. And I'm thinking, well, it doesn't quite work that way.

You can't earn your way. Not working for salvation, but work it out. In other words, if you are saved, this will show itself in a particular way as you shine, as you are this different person, a work of God. And that's what Paul wants to remind them of this. They're a good church, and they already worked with the apostle Paul. They worked with him in so many ways. Look at Philippians 4, 15, and 16.

Philippians, you Philippians, know in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you only. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

It was obvious that God had done a work in their heart, and they were already working. They were partnering Paul in the gospel. They were using their time, their money, their energies to further the gospel, and they were willing to support Paul. And it was, as a result of that, they really bound well together. They were obedient to Paul, and that's what Paul's saying in verse 12 of chapter 2.

[ 24 : 26 ] He's not with them. He says, you were obedient in my presence. Now that I'm not there, continue to be obedient. Work it out. Do it yourself. Work out your salvation. Serve the Lord. And that's what he wants them to do, to continue the work with fear and trembling. So, they're not dependent on him, but they are to work out this salvation. And it's quite something. One of the commentators says this, justification, justification, which is when you become a Christian, when you're pronounced righteous before God. Justification must be followed by the experiential aspects of sanctification.

He is Savior. He is also Lord. And this should be the case. Usually, I'm always encouraging folk to join the church. I was saying to a couple of folk this week, I would never encourage folk to join a church of which I am a pastor. It's just the way I am. But I would crawl over broken glass to get them to join a church somewhere. Join a church. You're saved. You have gifts, spiritual gifts. Use them in the local church. That's why I would never join a big church where the people come and they sing and the dust settles on them. You almost choke when you're trying to preach in such a congregation.

They're all just warming the pew. London was a bit like that. They would come to church like consumers often. They're so busy. They don't have any slack to give God. I'm just so busy. I'm working seven to seven, really. And whereas we need to serve the Lord, and he's given us gifts. And the local churches is where we do that, where we become accountable to each other, where we serve. The church is the workhouse of God. And I can encourage you, if you're not a member, think about either this church or another church. But don't be a spiritual nomad. Northern Ireland was a bit like that spiritual. You'd be saved. A number of years later, you'd be baptized. And if you were super dedicated, another few years, you'd join a church. For me, I'm saved. Baptize me right away.

Where'd they assign? And then within minutes, I was placed in charge of the youth work because there was nobody else to do it. I mean, that's thrown in at the deep end. My view, if you're a Christian, you have a policyer. There's a work for you to do. And Paul says, shine. Shine in the local church.

Work out your salvation. And Jesus says the same thing. You are the light of the world and so forth. Let your light shine. That they may see your good deeds. It's not enough that you believe the right things, but you do the right things. Because Paul says, we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that he has prepared for in advance. God has good works for you to do as a Christian. Every Christian is a work of God prepared for good works. The local church is where those things are worked out. So, even in verse 13, Paul reminds them that God who works in them to act according to his good purpose. God doesn't just save you. He works in you to do these good works. It's not just down to you. He can empower you. And as I begin a ministry here, my ministry has always been to give away my ministry. I know pastors that have left churches and the whole church has imploded and they say, aye, they needed me and so forth. I think that's a failure, a massive failure. It's like a GP. A GP doesn't want the patient to be completely dependent on the GP. The GP wants the person to have the person standing on his own two feet and being able to function. A pastor's the same. That when a pastor leaves the church, the church should be strong spiritually. And there may be preachers, there may be teachers, there may be our task as elders is to bring out the gifts, to prepare people for works of service. We need to remember that. And to have the machinery all in place, we are to do the work of

[ 28 : 46 ] God. God wants you to shine in Westerhills. This is not an easy area. There's no areas that are easy. The hardest area for me, one of the hardest, was the one I just left. Incredibly affluent. Rita Chakrabati and Steve Pemberton and all these folk that you see in the telly were my neighbors. And Emma Thompson and George Michael used to live there and Peter Sellers. It was just a who's who of where people had nightmare to try and minister there. Christians were just so busy, so busy, keeping time. So, work. Keep up the good work. Secondly, keep the peace in this passage. One thing that will snuff out your glow is disunity. Disunity is everything. Unity, sorry, is everything in the local church. If you don't have unity, you will really struggle and your light will dim. Instead of being a bright light, you'll become this wee, I can dim my lights under my work surface thing. It's great. It's amazing what gadgets do. Thankfully for a guy. Anyway, it does it for me. Look at this,

Lucille. It can go up and down. But you don't want your light to be dimmed. And one thing that will dim your light is disunity. It just kills any gospel ministry and shining. That's why he says in verse 14 of chapter 2, do everything without complaining or arguing that you may become blameless, pure, children of God, and a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine. So, in other words, if you are to shine, you are to do things without arguing and complaining. It is such an important thing. This church was a good church, but even within this good church who partnered Paul, there were people who had fallen out. And he mentions two women here, Euodia and Syntyche.

Two women who at one time fought at Paul's side, and they're now fighting with each other. The energies they use for the gospel are now used internally. And you've heard them nicknamed you odious and soon touchy. And that is what people can be like. Sad to say, it really is heartbreaking when Christians are to shine like stars, and they can just fall out. He mentions two things here, arguing. That's the thing he mentions here, without grumbling or arguing. Let's look at grumbling, first of all, under this arguing thing. Grumbling and complaining. It's discontentment, isn't it? I like the word grumbling. It explains it well. You just grumble. It's a low-frequency thing. You're not shouting at the top of your voice. You're just grumbling. I'm happy with that.

It doesn't really take much in churches. Believe you me, it can be doctrine, which is a big thing, and that's worth fighting for. It can be music. It can be the way the seating is put out. It can be the temperature of the building, the flavor of the coffee, a look that somebody gave you. I don't know what it is, but she gave me a look. And it's so easy for Christians to be blown off course.

I remember when my wife miscarried in Northern Ireland, and we were sitting in casualty, watching casualty in Northern Ireland. I remember that. And it was just the way the doctors were.

[ 32 : 26 ] Get out of my sight. You're a waste of space. Say it to one of the nurses. And then after doing this to save this body, and afterwards, she comes up and says, look, I'm really sorry. Yeah, I lost the plot. It says, don't worry about it. Back into the race again. Back into doing what they're doing.

They can't afford to fall out long term. They're saving lives. And as Christians, we need to keep that on board as well. What are we all about? Grumbling because things aren't quite the way we would like. And in every church that I have pastored, they have been Christians with their hobby horses. As you become a Christian, I remember Northern Ireland, they loved the gospel.

You would see, and if you've been there, text on lampposts, are you washed in the blood? They would witness to anybody. The way you get your car MOT'd, you drive it in, they do all the hocus pocus.

They either fail you or don't. And the guy inevitably in Ballymena would say, do you read? And then he would give you a tract to witness to the gospel, which I always thought was brave after he failed you. And he's given you this. You wouldn't thank him for it.

But they would witness to anybody, sheep and everything. But they had their hobby horses. In every church I've been in, there have been Christians who have their hobby horses. It can be usually one of a few things. Sometimes it can be doctrine, the doctrines of grace. We are five-point Calvinists, and if you're not one of us, yeah, away you go. Or it can be creation, literal seven days, non-literal seven days, and that can divide churches. I was one church where that was a big thing. Others that can be the place of the Jews in God's plan of salvation. That can divide church because you don't quite see it the way I do. It can be the second coming. I could never preach on the second coming in Northern Ireland. It was such a hot potato. The fact that the Lord's coming back and we could rejoice, I couldn't touch it because folk would say, well, you never said that, brother, and you never said that. So you just think, just leave it. It's just too divisive.

[ 34 : 28 ] How the world began, how it will end. We don't have clear guidance on this. We need to keep things loosely and not major and minor things and not make them the cause of division. And this is what can easily happen. We begin to grumble over many things. The world is a grumbling and complaining thing.

You only need to watch the news. It doesn't matter if somebody does something good. The BBC or ITV will focus on, but what about this wee thing that you're doing? And what about that? And it's always negative, just negative, the whole thing. They'll find fault with the coronation after a few days, and Prince Harry and everybody. It's just negative. It's very easy for us to be assimilated into the world and to adopt that saying, well, we don't quite like it like this. Can we not have that?

And while we're doing that, we take our eyes off the ball, and more importantly, we stop shining. That's not impressive. The world does that. They're not shining. That's not impressive. They're a one-watt bulb. You're a 50-watt LED. You're giving it big licks if you're a Christian.

Paul says to them, keep the peace. Don't argue or complain. But he knows what's behind it. Arrogance is what's behind this. So, he says, look at verse 2 of chapter 2, make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and one in mind.



Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves. Not looking to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Those are massive, massive verses. Your church will shine if you can do this. If your church isn't nitpicking, but you're considering, when I do marriage classes and difference between husband and wives and roles, husbands ahead of the house, I just say, look, you'll never get it wrong if you say, after you, dear. No, after you, dear. After you, dear. And the two of you are fighting for the benefit of the other. You'll never go wrong in your marriage. You'll not go wrong in the church.

[ 36 : 42 ] But the minute somebody stands up and says, wait till ye hear the knowledge I have, I'm here to put you right. I was in one church where for two years, I used to say they were critical and judgmental.

They were in each other's cases the whole time for two years. And then I changed my mind after two years and said they were actually worse than that. They were cruel and vindictive. Because they would say, they would come and put somebody right and walk away in the spirit of triumphalism saying, Lord, I thank you for showing me to put my brother or sister right in the Lord. I thank you that I'm not like them. And it's shocking. Absolutely. That was a church where its light was danger of going out.

It changed. It changed by probably the only time I've had in 30 years of ministry, but the Holy Spirit went whoosh, come down in a morning and transformed the whole church, including myself. I stood in the pulpit, that tears blinded me. Just, it was, there was just lack of love. But the Lord changed us. Oh, that we get that every week. I mean, I've never had that before, never had it since. It was quite something. And that's where it would have taken. And Sunday school teachers come in and went, what's happened here? And then folk were in wee groups confessing sin. Somebody came to this church on Sunday night and says, I've been coming here for 23 years.

This is the first time I've wanted to come to church. They were coming out of duty. And this is the time they actually wanted to come to be with God's people. You can be coming regularly here and just be miffed at everybody around about you and smile away and drink the tea and coffee.

But deep down, there can be hardness of heart. We need to be aware of this. Here's a quote from the NIV application commentary.

[ 38 : 32 ] The world must be able to see it and draw conclusion from what they see. The church's unity should be just as clear as a beacon shining in the night. Sadly, the church too often fails to show the world concrete expressions of unity and so obscures an important witness to the gospel.

At the bottom of this flurry of discontented words is nearly always the desire of each side in the dispute to dominate the other, to see that their concerns are addressed even if the interests of others are neglected. As a result, the advance of the gospel is lost in the bitter exchanges and the backbiting. We need to take that seriously, always. We need to guard against that. Our hearts is deceitful and desperately wicked. We're only that away from an argument at any one time, especially when we hold the things tighter than the Lord would have us hold. So, keep the peace. Keep up the work. Keep up the peace. Thirdly and lastly, keep the faith. Keep the faith. Verse 16, as you hold out the word of life. Now, that can be understood in two ways. It can be hold onto the word of life.

In other words, doctrine. Look at chapter 1, verse 27. Whether I come and see or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel. We are all defenders of the faith. We might even be far better than King Charles will be.

We are. When you're a Christian, you're not only saved, you love the gospel, you love the faith, once delivered to the saints. Your task is to defend that faith, not to give it up, not to sell the jerseys, but to give it up for the Lord and to keep a hold of the faith, full armor of God, and so forth. So, hold onto the word of life, that I know where you stand firm in one Spirit, striving together for the faith, without being frightened, 1.28, in any way by those who oppose you. It's been granted to you not only to believe, but also to suffer. The temptation is to lose your distinctiveness nowadays, to blend in. It's hard as a Christian, isn't it, in the workplace, young folk nowadays, to stand up and say you're a Christian, that you live in a particular way. Lucille, after Bible college, had a job. In fact, so did I. I forgot. We had a wee job in Hagerston. She worked in reception. I worked in security, which is, I said, how does that work? Anyway, by the time that the fighting had all died in the nightclub-y thing, I was just mopping it up, which is just as well. I didn't fancy throwing myself in. But anyway, we did that. But I remember once Lucille just happened to say to the women on reception, before we were married, we never slept together. They couldn't believe it.

They were mortified. I think the goldfish stopped swimming as well and went, what's up with you two? No, we never slept together until we were married. And we live in a world that's just a completely different rules. And we need to hold on to what we believe and not be frightened and say, this is what we believe. But do it so with gentleness. The other meaning can also be hold out the word of life.

[ 41 : 58 ] To hold out, hold out the gospel message, to shine evangelism, mission, the need to make him known. The strap line of one of the churches I was in was very simple. Some churches reach, build, send. I think that's Charlotte Chapel. And there's a few others. The church in Derbyshire just had knowing Jesus and making him known. And I thought, that's fairly good. I quite like that. We want to know Jesus, grow in the faith, but make him known. And our task is not just to know Jesus and to have the warm fuzzies and answers to prayer and have a good quiet time. There's this other side. We need to make him known. We need to shine in darkness. That's not easy. And we need to pray for opportunities to do this as individuals in the workplace and our families, but also as a church. It took five years in one of the churches I was in. The church met together. They were great, but they never saw the community. They just never saw them. The community was very different from them, and they never seen them.

And I was looking for a silver bullet. Lord, what's it going to take? And it took five years before the right thing came along. And I knew this was of God. And I think that was right. They needed to sort out a few things, going back to getting a healthy church before the Lord puts new babes in Christ into it. That is so important. The Lord won't add to a church that's feuding. And anyway, five years later, and from getting about two people or three people from the estate at Christmas and maybe Easter, they're now doing things where they get about 110 folk coming in. We did a cafe. We did various things. And the work really grew. Men's meetings and various things. And it's great when that happens.

And then we had the opportunity to hold out the word of life. And it's such an important thing. Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all nations. And beginning at Jerusalem, beginning where we are, and begin in Samaria. People are very different from us. Samaritans, different from us. And into all the world, we are to do this. Make Jesus known. In this letter, there's 104 verses. In 51 of those verses, you will find the names of Jesus. Either Christ Jesus, Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus, Jesus Christ, Lord Savior. Paul just cannot string a sentence together without mentioning Jesus. For some of us, we need a crowbar before we'll mention Jesus. Sometimes we can be so vague we'll mention God. But you remember, I preached that sermon on the glory of Christ.

To make him known. Preach Jesus. Hold out the word of life. So, our text for the year, text for the year, text for the next few months, is shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. We do this by keeping up the good work, the work that God's already begun. He will continue to work in and through us. There's a work for us to do, to be obedient morally, but also to serve in the local church. We are to keep the peace, not grumbling or arguing about petty things, not being arrogant, but humbly considering others better than their self, and quick to forgive, and to keep the essentials, but do away with the non-essentials, and keep the faith. Hold on to the doctrines of the faith. Get to know the doctrines, and hold out the word of life, evangelism, mission. One of our churches, one of the churches where I preached this wee series in, they made a banner of these verses, shine like stars in. I've never been in a church with any banners. I used to think banners were wacky.

It was for folk that just put a dove in it, and a fiery thing, and I went, they're not having that in my church, sorry. But they made this massive big banner, and it says, I'm doing a banner, pastor. And I went, really? And I went, right, okay, make your banner beautiful, just diverse, and shiny things, stars, a black piece of felt, and it was there for years. They just got into this book. I've been in churches. That's why, if I was your pastor, full-time, I would have done Philippians, regardless. I'm not doing this just to fill in the time. I would have done Philippians. God, in His grace, has used me to bless churches through this. I hope that will be the case. When I heard that Daniel had done this, I went, what have I done? But I thought, I'll stick with it. I will stick with it. I preached this in another church that never heard a word. Did the whole series. I preached the same sermon in a church just up the road. Same demographics, same thing. They carried me shoulder high out the building. The Lord really spoke to them, and I thought, how does that happen? Whole church never heard. So pray for the series going forward, that the Lord will give us ears to hear. If He wants to communicate anything, something He wants to put His finger on, that will do this. We're not playing at this, are we? We want our church to grow. It always begins with the house of God, and the Lord can add to His church daily those who are being saved. Let's stand and we'll sing, great is the darkness that covers the earth. Let's think of the words, this is the world in which we live. It is indeed in great darkness, and our task is to shine like stars in the universe. The other thing that I'll say is, I'm leading in a couple of weeks' time. I'm leading tonight, actually. Usually, I notice in your songs you have the wee curly thing at the end sometimes. Charlotte Chapel was the first place I came across where they did this, and every church I've been in, I've introduced that, have the wee curly thing. And basically,

[ 47 : 50 ] I say to folk, if you're singing this song and you come to that and you see this as a last verse, it's an opportunity for you to go, I've not really been singing this. It's the opportunity for you. It's the last verse. Let's give it big licks. But the other thing is, can I encourage you to, certainly during the time I'm here, see when the minute the music begins, stand at that point.

Everybody, it's like whack-a-mole. You ever seen them in the thing where they're all coming up at different bits, and visitors are looking and they don't know what to do? You can have a heart attack just standing before the start of the song. And there's nothing worse if you're singing as you're rising to your feet, just slovenly. So see the first note on your pins, and you're ready to go.

Let's use that as a formula, shall we? Let's stand and sing. Amen. What a great song to finish with. Let's close in prayer.

Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your reward. Truly, it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We thank you, Father, for all that we have heard this morning and learned. Father, I do just pray that your Holy Spirit would move powerfully in each one of our lives, either at a personal level or at a corporate level as a church. Father, we pray, first of all, that you would make us godly men and women who naturally shine as we hold out the word of life.

And we pray, Father, that we would have those opportunities in the workplace, in the communities, in our families, and in this area. Father, lead us and guide us, we pray. We look to you for blessing.

[ 49 : 29 ] Help us to walk humbly with our God. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, folks. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 51 : 33 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 54 : 03 ] Thank you.