

Here we are, stuck in the rut of another Western PA Winter.

Crazy stretch of weather that doesn't seem to be breaking anytime soon. It seems totally appropriate that Groundhog's Day is just around the corner.

Groundhogs' day is a crazy little celebration apparently cook up by some German immigrants to add a little levity while they waited for Spring. Apparently back in the old-country they dragged a hedgehog or badger out it's burrow in an attempt to predict the weather – but since there aren't too many badgers here, they chose the lowly groundhog.

It's a particularly important day here in Western PA – especially since the 1993 movie called Groundhog Day. Prior to the movie a few thousand would gather at a park called Gobbler's Knob in Punxsutawney but that number swelled to nearly 50,000 last year.

The movie has become a kind of cultural classic. If you've never seen it, it focuses on a self-absorbed weather man from Pittsburgh named Phil Connors, who is sent to Punxsutawney to cover Groundhog's Day. It's clear from the beginning that Phil thinks it's all beneath him – the town, the people and the little rodent.

He arrives with his crew and goes through the motions of the story, with plenty of eyerolls hoping to get back to the big city asap -- but when a storm rolls in, which Phil the weatherman said would blow over, the team is forced to stay overnight.

The main crux of the story is that the calendar never moves forward. Each day continues to play out, exactly as the day before. So Phil, the arrogant weatherman, is stuck reliving Groundhog's Day over and over.

He wakes up to the same song, interacts with the same people, and experiences the same frustration, day after day after day after day. Well, you get the picture --

Here's a quick clip . . .

How easy is it for us to relate to that? From a weather stand point we're actually living it in real life – but from a figurative standpoint, I think we've all had seasons where we feel as if we're stuck. Same old, same old.

Like walking on a treadmill. Moving constantly but not going anywhere.

Whether it's an unfulfilling job, a difficult relationship, chronic health problems, whatever long situation you're facing, whatever variety of grind you're trudging through, it's easy to grow weary and feel like things will never change.

But, thanks to the magic of Hollywood, Groundhog Day the movie breaks out of its never-ending Groundhog Day loop and chronicles Phil's eventual journey from a self-absorbed, rude jerk -- to an others-focused, generous friend.

In fact, by the end of the movie, he transforms so completely, he stops using people and starts serving them.

Here's the lesson for us in Phil's transformation: **nothing changed in his life, until he did.**

Now, while this may seem unrelated to our study of Philippians, the church there was caught in its own kind of loop.

And as we explore what might have the reasons for that loop – and more importantly, how they were instructed to break free, will you join me in prayer,

## **Pray**

Think back to the start of our study, when Pastor Alan gave us some of the background of this church and you'll remember this was not a brand-new congregation – they were about 10 years old when Paul wrote this letter.

Paul was particularly fond of the Philippians. This is his warmest and most love filled of all his letters to the churches. But while this church was

- remarkably loyal to the gospel,
- gave sacrificially and
- had deep affection for Paul . . .

They had some real work to do. And Paul, as their spiritual father, called them out in pretty direct terms. Let's look back to the start of chapter 2. Paul wrote:

**Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.**

**3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. ~ Philippians 2:2-4**

Why did Paul tell them get along and the selfishness? To work together, love each other and be united?

Because they weren't doing it!

They were selfish, showy, proud and self-centered. There was trouble between some prominent members in the church and while we don't get the details about disagreement until chapter 4, their tensions or disagreements posed a serious threat to their witness and work.

But they were up against it based on the world around them. Philippi was a tough city. As a prestigious Roman colony and military outpost, it was inhabited largely by Roman veterans and dominated by Roman culture – from language to religion, customs and attitudes.

Traditionally the city had not welcomed Jews. We know from Acts 16, there was no synagogue there. Which meant the majority within the church came from pagan backgrounds and had little knowledge of the Scriptures which put them at a real disadvantage spiritually.

Add to that, they were also battling false teachers and suffered the constant threat of persecution.

But -- this list Paul laid on them doesn't focus on the pressures from without, but attitudes from within. So, it's clear, their real challenges weren't from the world around them, but ones that were sourced in their hearts and bubbled up and out.

Their patterns of behavior created a sort of prison. With their focus on themselves, their determination to defend their rights, and maintain their prominence, in many ways their fellowship mirrored the culture around them, not the Holy Spirit within them.

And friends, we can fall into the same trap. But there is hope because as we studied last week, Jesus is our chief Example. He is our model and his attitude is our goal. And as we study this very practical section, we'll see that faith in Jesus and an active embrace of His priorities is the key to breaking free.

Here's the main point I want us to unpack today:

**Our days will change when our hearts change.**

Let's learn how as we look at today's text. Philippians 2:12-14

**Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. 13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.**

**~Philippians 2:12-13**

I see **two action** items here, in the same sentence.

#1 = Work Hard.

#2 = Obey God.

Now, there has been confusion over these verses. Some translations say "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" which makes it sound like we are to work for our salvation. That's not the case at all.

You see, we are to work-out what God is working-in. Work to show the results of what God is doing within.

**#1 Work hard.**

What does it mean to work hard?

The verb “work-out” used here has the same connotation as “working to completion.” It was used in the first century to describe “working in a mine” to thoroughly extract all the ore or precious metal. Or working as a farmer “in a field” to work the land in such a way as to produce a great harvest.

Work implies effort – it’s the opposite of leisure.

Dallas Willard said it this way:

**Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. Grace is receiving a free gift that we do not deserve. God sent his son Jesus into the world to save us. There is nothing we did to deserve this.**

**~ Dallas Willard**

What’s more, the reason we are to work hard is because our lives have tremendous potential and God wants us to be the person He has planned for us from the beginning.

Remember the promise from Phil. 1:6?

**He who began a good work in you is faithful to complete it.**

That good work that God want complete in us – requires our engagement not passivity.

It requires discipline and determination. It’s the kind of “all-in” attitude Paul modeled. Because later in the section, he likens himself to a drink offering poured out – so there is an overtone of sacrifice.

And so, in partnership with the Holy Spirit, our work is becoming increasingly obedient.

That’s the second instruction:

**#2 = Obey God.**

Your obedience matters. God cares about it, because the posture of your heart has consequences.

Now there is a modifier in this verse that describes the way we are to work and obey – look back at end of verse 12 – with deep reverence and fear.

Did you know the most common command in Scripture is “**Fear Not.**” But here, we are expressly told to work at it WITH Fear.

The kind of fear Paul is referring to here in vs12 is fear of God. Respect for and devotion to Him. Treating Him as holy.

It’s an attitude or heart posture that’s the opposite of casual, haphazard, or ordinary.

Important for us to remember – God is not playing. He wants to use us, to bless us, and build His kingdom through us -- but we must do our part to follow closely. To obey Him and do as Jesus did. That’s how we become more like Him. [Do things His way not our way]

Now, there’s another type of fear that shows up in the Bible – and probably very frequently in each one of our hearts. It’s our natural response to threats or danger, real or imagined. And it wields a lot of power over our minds, so much so, one expert called fear a “dictator” because it commands and dominates other brain processes.

But God knows how we’re wired. He wants us to look away from what frightening us and look to Him in trust. Because the only way to counter fear, is with faith.

And that’s what the Philippians were lacking. It’s this “wrong” kind of fear is what mires our minds and catches our feet in quicksand so we can’t move forward or break free.

Whether its fear of people, fear of losing position or place, losing our livelihood or even our lives – Jesus showed us how to trust the Father. And as we studied last week, Jesus proved his trust by handing over His position, His privilege, His authority and ultimately His very life trusting in the Father’s character, power, and love.

And He’s inviting us to do the same. Because,

## **Faith confronts fear.**

Look back at the text – 2<sup>nd</sup> half of verse 12.

**Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. 13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.**

Work hard – why? Obey God – why? Because while fear says it's all on me – God says, no I'm already working in you.

You see, he's already doing it!

We get trapped in the grind of self-reliance when we try to manage all the outcomes.

- How we appear or if we have approval

But isn't it easier to **stick** with what we know?? It's so easy to walk in the track of habit and go through the motions, but that's how we get stuck - by sticking with **what you know** – instead of reaching out to **Who you know**.

Faith beckons us forward to refocus our attention on the One who overcame – and promises to help us when we need it most.

We must remember we are not alone in this. Listen to these encouraging words about Jesus, our High Priest from Hebrews 4:

**This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. 16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.** ~ Hebrews 4:15-16

And by **boldly** embracing that kind of faith, we can even overcome our attitude in the grind. Listen to our next instruction:

**Do everything without complaining and arguing, 15 so that no one can criticize you.** ~ Philippians 2:14-15a

The word used here for “complaining” is rare in the NT – but frequently used in OT specifically to describe Israel’s attitude during their desert wanderings.

As they traveled to the promised land, after God miraculously rescued them out of slavery –

- They complained about Moses -- which was really a complaint about God’s leadership.
- They complained about the boring menu saying they missed the pots of meat they had in Egypt, rather than being thankful for God’s miraculous provisions by sending manna in the desert.

Jesus said this:

**What you say flows from what is in your heart. ~ Luke 6:45**

So, in reality, the Israelites real problem wasn’t in their surroundings or in their circumstances, but in their hearts.

Sadly, their murmurings and complaints had serious consequences. Their ungrateful, faithless attitude earned them a terrible punishment. They forfeited their inheritance and NEVER entered the promised land.

Now, because God is a promise keeper, He kept His word and rescued His chosen people and gave them the land flowing with milk and honey – but He gave it to another generation. How tragic and sobering.

You know, it’s a lot easier to grumble and complain than do the hard work of facing why we’re stuck where we’re stuck. The first step out is **to look up instead of out** and ask God to help us understand what’s going on.

Looking UP focusing on Who He is – it takes our eyes off ourselves and others helps us slough off the old posture and move out in obedience.

Looking up reminds us that He is working even when we don’t see it or feel it.

When life seems purposeless, we need to remember that God is working within you – you have purpose and He has the power help you realize it in fulness.



I want to share a testimony from a pioneering woman from our congregation, Micheline Ouedraogo founder of Bridges to Burkina. The organization she founded focuses on providing education to orphans and support to widows in her home-county of Burkina Faso.

She just published a book and even though I've only read a part of it – I've been so touched by her testimony of faithfulness and focus as she works to complete the work God has birthed in her heart.

Here is her real-life application of this verse:

*"To continue my education beyond the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I had to leave my parents at the age of 11 and move thousands of miles away to live with one of my older sisters. I am grateful to my sister and her family for welcoming me to their home so I could have the chance to continue my schooling.*

*Education was not just about reading and writing – it was my way to honor the sacrifices my parents had made. I studied by kerosene lamp and sometimes candlelight, often falling asleep over my book but I refused to quit. I began to realize that determination was more than a feeling; it was the daily choice to keep going when everything in you want to stop.*

*But life with my relatives was not easy. I went from being the youngest, cherished child in a busy household to a "responsible" girl with many chores. I quickly learned that if I wanted something, I would have to work for it. Sometimes I felt invisible. Other times I felt the sting of unkind words. Yet I clung to my parents teaching:*

*"Do everything without grumbling or arguing." That verse became my silent prayer when my heart was heavy.*

*Looking back I see those years shaped me in ways I couldn't understand at the time. They taught me the value of perseverance, the importance of holding onto faith in hardship and the reality that sometimes God's path for us includes seasons of discomfort so we can grow stronger."*

As Micheline testifies, you don't break out of the grind by escaping it – but by letting God work through you in it.

Remember, **Our days change when our hearts change.**

The world is stuck in cycles of fear – control – frustration – grumbling – division and darkness. But:

**Faith shines in darkness.**

Let's look at back at Phil 2:

**Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. 16 Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. 17 But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy. 18 Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy. ~ Philippians 2:15b-18**

Blameless, spotless lives don't withdraw from the world, they shine within it. They don't succumb to the grind, they apply their faith within it.

It's that kind of Faith that leads to joy even in sacrifice. What a remarkable thing Paul wrote from prison vs. 17:

“I will rejoice even if I lose my life . . . pouring it out it out like a drink offering . . . and I want you to share that joy!”

A drink offering in the OT sacrificial system was a specific amount of wine poured out at the base of the altar, or over the animal or grain offering. It was the final element in the ceremony – symbolizing the “topping” off of a sacrifice.

And it's the image Jesus used at the Last Supper where He took wine to represent the new covenant – He was the drink offering poured out for our salvation. And Paul uses it here to signify his complete surrender to Christ.

Again Paul's joy is found in his forward focus, his upward gaze, and his deep confidence that God will keep His word.

His attitude is one rooted in the attitude of Jesus. One of complete faith and confidence in our Heavenly Father.

Fear keeps us stuck – faith sets us free. God is inviting us to a life of freedom. And it begins by trusting Him.

You don't get out of your rut by playing it safe. Faith is a bold act against the fear that holds you back.

Remember the account of Peter's call to follow Jesus?

He was an experienced fisherman, and we're told after he had fished all night and not caught a thing Jesus called to him from the shore and told him to put his net back in on the other side of the boat.

His experience as a fisherman and the logic in his head said no, doesn't make any sense, but in obedience and faith he said yes – and when he did as Jesus instructed, he caught such a huge catch of fish, the boat began to sink!

What would have happened if he had refused? He would have missed the miracle.

It was crazy for Noah to build the ark, but the testimony in the book of Hebrews says, "Noah obeyed God who warned him about things that had never happened before." He did what God told him, saved his family and received the righteousness that comes by faith.

It was faith that propelled Abraham to leave and go to a land God promised him. Problem was, when God called Abraham, He didn't tell him where, He just told Him to go. He obeyed without knowing where he was going – and his obedience, his faith was credited to him as righteous.

It was by faith that Moses' parents hid him for three months because they saw God had them an unusual child, and they were not afraid to disobey the king's command.

And it was Moses, even though brought up in Pharaoh's household, had the faith to leave not fearing the king's anger. He kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible.

Reading through Hebrews 11 – there are so many examples of people who overcame their fear, broke free from their circumstances and lived with joy.

They experienced God's overcoming power, but here's the remarkable thing – God has not changed and the same promises of provision, presence, and power are offered to us. So, what's holding you back?

Let me encourage you to let God work in you. Let faith lift your eyes and free your life.

To get there maybe you need to let something go. Fear keeps us stuck – and sometimes we're not trying to be disobedient, we're not following God's instructions because we're afraid.

- Afraid of making the wrong decision.
- Afraid of disappointing someone
- Afraid that if we let go of control, things will fall apart.

Breaking free means trusting the truth that God is working in you.

**Faith doesn't make fear disappear; it means fear doesn't get the final word.**

When we trust God's work in us – we stop living stuck in fear and start living with purpose.

So what obedience have you delayed because of fear? What has you stuck because the alternative to the same old, same old feels too risky?

What would it look like to let faith guide you – to truly trust in a loving, sovereign, generous God and allow Him to lead the way?

Paul wanted more for his spiritual children in Philippi. And our Lord wants more for us too. Amen.

Pray to close.

*Lord help us to trust what you are already doing in us. Help us see beyond our circumstances, and break free from fear and out of the grind.*

*We declare that you are good, you are able, and you are here because your Word tells us and your Holy Spirit confirms it. Help us all to take one step close to you today.*