

Even If My Story Ends Differently [Philippians 4:20]

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Big Idea: A life surrendered to God always has a meaningful ending.

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// INTRODUCTION

All of us are wired with a desire for stories with great endings. Whether it's a book, a movie, or a TV show, we want that final chapter to be a good one. Think about it... we'll spend hours investing in stories. And if the ending doesn't deliver, we're robbed and betrayed.

You probably have one that immediately comes to mind. Think of a book, show, or movie that didn't end well. Not only did it disappoint you, but my guess is that it actually tainted your perspective of the whole story. **Here are a few that come to mind for me...**

TITANIC [movie]

- One of the most celebrated movies ever made, which won 11 Oscars.
- We were all completely in on Jack and Rose. Then Jack dies freezing to death in the Atlantic while Rose is saved by floating there on a wooden door in the water.
- There was room for him! Engineers have actually done calculations on this. There was a Mythbusters episode about it. He didn't have to die.

LOST [show]

- Six crazy seasons. Six years of your life invested in polar bears, smoke monsters, time travel, and the hatch and numbers. What does it all mean?
- After all of that, **the finale left more questions than answers!**
- People weren't just disappointed, they were angry.

THE SOPRANOS [show]

- If you know, you know. Eight years following Tony Soprano. One of the most critically acclaimed TV dramas in history.
- And it all ends with Tony sitting there in a diner with his family. Journey playing on the jukebox, and then a sudden cut to black. **No resolution and no answers.** Half the people just thought their cable went out.

Those of you who can relate, you know this frustration. ***It's because something deep within us is wired for resolution.*** We need stories to mean something. We want the endings to make sense. We are people built for narrative, and we know that when a story ends badly or abruptly, it taints the whole thing.

But here's the thing... that instinct doesn't just show up in books, movies, and TV shows. It shows up in real life.

We all have a story we wanted to end well, but it didn't.

- A marriage that was supposed to last.
- A marriage that was supposed to happen.
- A marriage that was supposed to lead to having kids.
- A career that was supposed to take off.
- A son or daughter, a prodigal, who eventually would come home.
- A diagnosis that was going to end differently.
- A dream that was supposed to come true.

And somewhere along the way, the ending didn't go the way we wrote it in our minds. And now we're left with that same empty feeling. ***It's not supposed to end this way.***

This is exactly what Paul is wrestling with as he writes the final lines of this letter to that church in Philippi. Except he's not watching a movie or TV show, he's living it. Living it out from a prison cell, waiting to find out if he's going to live or die.

And what does he do? ***He writes this...a doxology.***

²⁰Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen. [Philippians 4:20]

// PAUL'S UNKNOWN ENDING

We've been examining this letter called Philippians for the last 10 weeks. A letter written from a church planter named Paul whose been arrested and is serving his time in a Roman prison, chained to a guard 24-hours a day, waiting to find out if he's going to be executed or set free. He genuinely doesn't know. ***He writes this letter not knowing how his story will end.***

History tells us he was likely released after this imprisonment, and then he continued to preach across the Mediterranean, only to be arrested again under

Emperor Nero and most likely beheaded outside Rome around 67 AD. But he doesn't know that here. He's writing this letter with a ton of uncertainty. He doesn't know how his story will end.

And yet, what has this letter been full of? Contentment. Gratitude. Peace. Joy. In fact, it's one of the most joyful letters in ALL of the New Testament!

But here we are at the very end of this letter. His final send-off, and he does something that's so important for us to recognize. He bursts into a doxology. Just one sentence. But don't let its few words fool you. ***There is an entire theology of suffering, surrender, and hope condensed into this one single verse.*** To grasp it, we need to really understand one single word.

// WHAT "GLORY" MEANS

²⁰*Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen. [Philippians 4:20]*

Most of us, when we hear the word "glory," we may think of a feeling. Like a beautiful sunrise or sunset. An emotion, a sensation. Something almost too amazing for words.

But that's NOT what glory meant in Paul's world.

The Greek word here is doxa. In the ancient Mediterranean world, the world Paul lived in, doxa was not primarily emotional. ***It was relational and reputational.*** Glory meant public recognition of weight, worth, and honor. It was a word used for a person's reputation. It's what others acknowledged about that publicly.

So, when Paul writes, *"all glory to God,"* he's not just describing a feeling he has in that moment. He's making a public declaration... ***Let God's reputation be what stands. Let His name be what is honored and praised.*** He's saying, "Whatever happens to my story, let it point to Him."

Now, think about what that means coming from a man in prison. A man who doesn't know if he's going to be killed or set free. His response is not, *"I hope it all works out."* ***His response is, "Whatever the outcome, God gets the glory."*** God's reputation grows. God's the one who should be publicly recognized.

Paul isn't coping or giving up. He's doing the most courageous thing one could do. ***He's choosing to deliberately make his story about something BIGGER than his own ending.***

In Jewish and early Christian worship, a doxology was a specific literary form... a burst of praise, often showing up at the end of a letter or gathering. ***Something***

that anchored everything before it in the greatness of God. [EXAMPLE: God is good all the time and all the time... God is good.]

Paul uses doxologies a lot....

³⁶*For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen. [Romans 11:36]*

²⁷*All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen. [Romans 16:27]*

²¹*Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen. [Ephesians 3:21]*

Here's what I want you to notice. **A doxology is not something you write AFTER everything is resolved.** You don't want to write a doxology until your story ends well. Paul writes his from inside the prison, before the verdict is given. And that changes everything.

A doxology is NOT a response to a good outcome. It's a DECLARATION about who God is, regardless of the outcome.

Today, I'm going to invite you to do the same. But before we get there, I want you to see something. This isn't just a Paul thing. This is a pattern woven throughout the entire story of the Bible.

God has always worked this way. He specializes in stories that look broken from the outside but are glorious on the inside. He's the Author who writes meaning into the chapters we think are wasted.

JOSEPH

- His story could have ended in the pit his brothers threw him into. Or in Potiphar's house when he was falsely accused. Or in the Egyptian prison where he was forgotten.
- Every chapter looked like failure. **Every chapter seemed to look as though the story was over.** Yet, at the end, Joseph says this to the very brothers who betrayed him and sold him into slavery...
- *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."* [Genesis 50:20]

Joseph couldn't see that from the pit or prison, but he trusted it anyway. The doxa came THROUGH the dark chapters, not despite them.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

- His life ends in a prison cell, not unlike Paul's. Only he was beheaded by Herod. His life and ministry were cut short.
- Prior to this, he sends his friends to Jesus with a question about the validity of Jesus Himself... *“Are you really the Messiah, or should we keep looking?”*
- And yet, Jesus says about him... *“I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist.”* [Matthew 11:11]

What the world saw as abrupt and unjust, Jesus called faithful. The chapter looked like loss, but God's reputation grew anyway.

JESUS

- Then there's the cross. It was the ultimate “this isn't the ending we hoped for.” Every disciple scattered. The one they invested in and followed for three years was gone. Friday looked like the story was finished.
- But the ending that looked like a catastrophe became the very thing that redeemed us.

The pattern is clear, and it runs from Genesis through Revelation... ***God does not waste the hard chapters.*** He writes meaning into what looks like loss. He brings glory through what looks like defeat.

//FOREVER AND EVER

²⁰*Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.* [Philippians 4:20]

Forever and ever. Literally meaning, unto the end of time. ***It's the most emphatic expression for eternity that could be used in the Greek language.*** You couldn't have said it any more strongly.

Paul is saying... however your story ends, that's temporary. The glory of God is eternal.

Let me be clear because I don't want to sound dismissive. If your story has taken a really hard turn... a horrible diagnosis, a significant loss, a relationship that's been shattered, a door that's been permanently closed... Paul isn't minimizing the pain. He's not even saying it doesn't matter.

He's simply contextualizing it. ***He's placing your story inside a story that has no ending.***

¹⁷For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. [2 Corinthians 4:17-18]

The pain is real. The weight of our hurt is real. Paul isn't minimizing it; he's lived it. ***But he's done the math...*** the weight of eternal glory outweighs the weight of present suffering.

Your chapter matters, but it's not the final word. Whatever ending you're afraid of, whatever conclusion you're dreading, it is NOT the last sentence in the story. The last sentence belongs to God... and it reads... forever and ever. Amen!

// YOUR DOXOLOGY

Ten weeks ago, we started this series built on two of the most honest words a follower of Jesus can say... Even if.

- Even if I don't know what's next.
- Even if life feels like a prison.
- Even if I don't get my way.
- Even if I'm tired of the grind.
- Even if I'm overlooked.
- Even if I lose everything.
- Even if I haven't arrived yet.
- Even if contentment feels impossible.
- Even if my story ends differently.

Ten honest confessions of what life looks like when you're trying to follow Jesus in the real world. Here's what I hope you've noticed throughout it all... ***Paul's answer wasn't try hard... think more positively... just get through it...***

Every answer, in every chapter, in every circumstance, pointed to the same place. Christ. Present. Sufficient. Worthy of glory.

Now, at the end of this letter, with his own story still unwritten, he does the only thing that makes sense. He writes a doxology. He gives God glory. Not because he

knows how it will end. But because he knows who God is, and that will always be true.

What is the chapter of your story that feels unfinished?

What is the ending that you haven't seen yet?

Can you write a doxology over that? Not a denial of the pain. Not a fake “I’m fine” wrapped up in spiritual language. But a real, honest declaration that says, “Whatever happens, You are God, and I know You are good. Whatever the ending looks like, may Your reputation grow. All that I am and ever hope to be, I owe it all to You.”

That is “even if” faith. That’s what Paul lived. That’s what I’m inviting you into today.

// CLOSING

In 1971, a young gospel musician named Andrae’ Crouch was working at the Los Angeles Center of Teen Challenge, a faith-based organization that helps people with problems like substance abuse. On the first day there, he became friends with an ex-prisoner named Larry.

Sometime later, Andrae got a call from Larry, and he said, “Hey Andy, This is Larry. I had a dream about you the other night. I dreamed you were going to write a song that is going to go around the world. It will be the biggest song you ever wrote to this day.”

Andrae asked what the song would be about, and Larry encouraged him to read John 17. In that passage, Jesus prays to the Father these words, “***Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you.***”

The next morning, Andrae got up singing the words, “to God be the glory.” He went to the piano and wrote the song My Tribute in about 10 minutes.

The bridge of this song says it perfectly... ***“Just let me live my life, let it be pleasing, Lord to Thee. And if I gain any praise, let it go to Calvary.”***

That is a doxology. ***That is Philippians 4:20 set to music.***

My Tribute by Andrae Crouch

*How can I say thanks
For the things You have done for me?
Things so undeserved,
Yet You gave to prove Your love to me;*

*The voices of a million angels
Could not express my gratitude.
All that I am and ever hope to be,
I owe it all to Thee.*

*To God be the glory,
To God be the glory,
To God be the glory
For the things He has done.*

*With His blood He has saved me,
With His power He has raised me;
To God be the glory
For the things He has done.*

*Just let me live my life,
Let it pleasing, Lord to Thee,
And if I gain any praise,
Let it go to Calvary.*