

Philippians 1:1-7
Falling Forward
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11-4-18

There's a guy named Paul Salopek who is walking around the world in 10 years. And I like the way he describes walking, he calls it "Falling Forward." That's a great image for me of the Christian life, *falling forward*. He's writing a blog for National Geographic, and he describes it this way: **"Walking is falling forward. Each step we take is an arrested plunge, a collapse averted, a disaster braked. In this way, to walk becomes an act of faith. We perform it daily, a two-beat miracle, an iambic teetering a holding on and letting go. For the next 7 years I will plummet across the world. I am on a journey."**

Isn't that neat. I think you and I are on a journey as well. We are walking from a past that is full of experiences and circumstances we can never retrieve, to a future we cannot yet see. The bible tells us that for everything there is a season. And if you've looked out the window this week you, no doubt will attest, that we too are in a changing season. As I was driving the kids to school on Wednesday of this week, pulling out of the driveway Christian piped up from the backseat: "Woah Dad! Look at how bright that yellow tree is, oh and red and orange and purple." This is why we live in the north for just these seasonal changes.

We are in a seasonal change here at WPC as well. This is the season in which we intentionally reflect upon the subject of generosity and our response to God's grace. This is the season in which our committees discern the direction of the Holy Spirit and the session discerns our 2019 budget. And we recognize over and over again that we all are on this journey, a journey from well begun to well done. That's what we all want to hear our Lord say to us when we meet him one day, right? Well done, good and faithful servant. Well how do we get from well begun to well done?

I think it starts by hearing what Paul writes to the church in Philippi: He who began a good work in you...will be faithful. For the next three weeks we are going to look together at these first 11 verses of the book of Philippians. This week we look at how our journey from well begun to well done, begins with gratitude, a thank you.

Paul and Timothy, servants^[a] of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers^[b] and deacons:^[c] ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷

The beginning of this letter, one of Paul's most beloved and encouraging correspondences, we see something funny. Is he really saying thank you to the Philippians?

Those of you who have kids or siblings are no doubt familiar with the subtle little rhetorical trick we use with one another. The non-apology apology. It goes something like this I'm sorry that the name I called you made you feel that way. Or I'm sorry that me getting to do that fun thing while

you had to stay home and do that un-fun thing made you feel that way. Do you see? It's not really an apology, you're not actually apologizing for the thing you said or did.

So, when Paul says I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, is this a non-thanks thanksgiving? I think it's actually more.

When Paul wrote this letter from Prison, either from Ephesus or Rome to one of the first churches founded in Europe, historians tell us that the Philippians sent a man named Epaphroditus to minister to Paul in Prison. He gives Paul a gift, and in turn Paul writes this letter and sends it back with Epaphroditus to thank the Philippian Church, saying: I thank my God for you.

I think this is actually more significant. I thank God for you. Do you see what is happening here? This expression of gratitude is now a three way expression. Scholars have written that the cultural backdrop of the church in Philippi is the ancient brokerage system, in which transactions take place between three parties: the Patron (the gift giver), gives the gift to broker, who then gives to a client. So, for Paul, the Philippian church was the conduit for passing along the blessings of God to Paul. And when Paul thanks the Philippians, he's thanking them as the channel through which the giver, God's blessings flow down. It's a three-way arrangement.

So what does this mean for us? The first implication of this three part, triangular relationship is that wherever you go, God is involved in your relationships—two people are really three people. You and I we share God's grace together, God is in our relationships.

Think about your relationships this way, it's not just that Paul and the Philippians have this common doctrinal bond between the two of them because they both believe in grace. I think we share God's grace in the context of all relationships, not just the relationships we share with other believers. When Paul was persecuting Christians in Acts chapter 8, the risen Jesus came to him and said why are you persecuting...them? No, me, why are you persecuting me? You see Jesus was already in the relationship.

God sees himself as the patron in all of our relationships, giving all good gifts to you through the other, and through you for another. I thank God for you. So that means in all your relationships it's not just you and them, or me and you. For the believing business woman, God is with her client and she is there to give something of herself to that relationship. This means that for the believing parent, God is present with your child's teachers and coaches and you are there to give something of God's grace to that person. We are brokers of God's mercy and blessing in the world.

This week, as many of you are aware our music director Rick Elliott had to go to the hospital and have an unexpected surgical procedure. It's why he isn't with us this morning, and I invite you to join me in praying dilligently for Rick's full recovery. But Rick, this week, called me from his hospital room with an idea. You see when families have loved ones who have entered end of life hospice care, there is a tender ministry that helps usher them from this life to eternity. What if we had a group of singers from our choir and beyond who were something of a hospice choir, that we could send people off in song, ushering them into the kingdom. This is what members of my mother's extended family do when one of our family members is near death, we sing them into the kingdom

God is already doing something in another's life, but we get to be the conduits of his grace in this sacred triangle.

Here's the second implication: small is big. Here's the perspective of the broker. Your thank you helps me to live into my God given value. Paul says to them, I thank my God for you. Recognizing that the Philippian Church has been the broker of God's grace to Paul helps them live into their God given calling. Not just I thank God for what God does, but I thank God for you, and what God does in you.

This week I had the chance to sit down with a person named Emily Sadjak(Shai-dock), Emily is from the Consultation firm who is conducting a Capital Campaign Feasibility Study for our church. And one of her first questions to me was what do you like about the church and your community?

I said, How much time do you have? I could have gone on for hours telling stories of God's kindness and generosity that have been displayed in us—but it is through you. It is you embracing your identity as member of this sacred triangle, that God's blessings flow. So, I thank God, for you. And I know many more do as well.

And lastly, the Patron. Paul says to the Philippians He who began a good work in you. God, the patron, is at work in your life. Sometimes we can't see it always in the middle. But Paul knew it was true, how? Because he knew Jesus. He met the risen Jesus who died on Friday, but was raised three days later. The God who is at work in you will bring it to completion, but we still have to live in the Saturday of begun, but not yet complete.

We are all somewhere between well begun and well done. When Paul wrote to the Philippians they were still a new developing and growing church, but they were on their way because they embraced this idea that they were both the recipient and the brokers of God's grace. And I think this is how you and we think of ourselves as well. No doubt everyone of us could come up with a list a mile long for how God has blessed us. And it's good to be thankful like this.

But equally, and perhaps even more interestingly, we are also the brokers through whom the mercy and grace of Christ are moving and flowing. The road is not always a clear and obvious one, sometimes its bumpy, for Paul it was imprisonment, for you it might be a challenge of a different sort. But like Paul Salopek we are falling forward, knowing that it's the tender arms and constant care of Jesus Christ that leads us forward.

Let's pray...